

E D W A R D D A L T O N,

THE

WANDERING EXECUTOR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

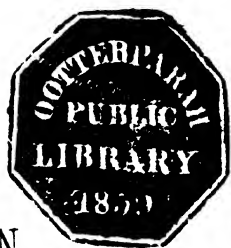
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CLARENDON

CHAPTER I.

OF all the lovely scenery that this “fair realm of England” can proudly boast, there is not anywhere a more charming variety of landscape than that which lies within ~~my~~ native county of merry Shropshire. That beautiful picture of plenty and comfort, which every true Englishman, were he asked, would pronounce to be the very essence of the beautiful in nature—the dells covered with the greenest verdure, and crowned at intervals on their summits by a feathery knoll, the remnants, perchance, of the old primeval forest—the pastures, knee-deep with grass or waving with golden grain—the cattle standing lazily in little groups under a fine old beech, or

perchance a breezy ash—the lanes rivalling some dim cathedral aisle with their leafy twilight—and the busy farm-yards, full of stacks, and cattle, and cackling poultry, make up a picture which has not its fellow in the world.

And it is to one fair nook of this lovely Eden that I would more particularly allude; and it is on a night of early spring, when the earth has just donned her first bright livery of green, that I would present it before your eyes. Far as the eye can stretch, the setting sun sheds its golden radiance over this lovely scene, throwing out in bold relief the massy verdure of the distant woods; making the bright green of the upland pastures still more vivid, until, dying away at the river's edge, it leaves the latter to flow on in its own dark and wayward fashion. In front, at about the distance of a quarter of a mile, stands a fair old hall, embosomed in its guardian woods; and it was to this old place, on such a night, that a chaise and four was proceeding at a rate that showed that the errand of its occupants was one of life and death.

They were but two; an old man, and a young boy, apparently not more than eight or nine years of age, whose bright head for many a weary mile had been pillowed in sleep on his aged companion's breast. The unexpected stoppage at the lodge-gates, followed so quickly by the sudden rolling on once more of the chaise, awoke the latter; he looked up for a moment, as if wondering in whose company he was; his fellow-traveller felt his little breast heave convulsively, and though the fast gathering darkness prevented his seeing it, he knew that those bright eyes were filled with tears.

The chaise was now rolling up the fair old avenue of limes, once the pride and glory of the old monks, whose domain they had adorned, but which now graced the approach to the mansion of Colonel Clarendon, who in his day had filled the various offices of a soldier, a courtier, a leader of fashion and a *bon vivant*.

"Is papa very, very ill, Simpson?" asked the sweet sad voice of the boy, after a pause.

"Very ill indeed, Master Herbert," was the

sad reply ; “or he would not have allowed them to send^c for you.”

“But he will get^c better, Simpson, will he not?” asked the boy with fearful eagerness, stealing his soft hand^c into the horny palm of his companion.

“God only knows, my dear young gentleman !” responded the old man sadly ; and a heavy sigh followed the response. “Dr. Baillie is very clever, to be sure, and master has a wonderful constitution ; but oh dear ! he is dreadfully weak and reduced just now—but here we are at home at last, thank God !” and the chaise presently drew up at one of the side entrances of the hall, at which a single footman was stationed.

He, too, was a greyheaded old man, and as he approached and let down the steps, there was none of that alacrity displayed either in his features or actions which in all old families,—

“ Welcomes the coming, speeds the parting guest.”
q

There was a deep, heavy, undisguised sorrow that had its counterpart in the two strangely mated

occupants of the crazy old chaise; there was a sadness about the whole, that communicated itself even to the crabbed old postilion—for even his voice grew husky, cracked and rough and uncouth as it was—as he asked how his honour was to-day, and received in reply the doleful shake of the head, that somehow or other speaks more eloquently than the most elaborate speech could do.

“Mr. Simpson, you’ll please to take Master Herbert to the Colonel’s bedroom,” said the old footman, as he lifted the poor little fellow out of the chaise; “Lady Susan and Mr. Vernon have just come, and our poor master—”

Mr. Simpson placed his finger on his lips, for the boy’s fair face which seemed as an index to the thoughts that passed in the soul within, so rapidly did the expression vary with every changing feeling, became dark with painful emotion; and then taking the poor little fellow’s hand, he led him across the vestibule, dimly lighted by a single lamp; from thence they passed into a large room in which several servants in livery were

stationed, and then mounting the grand staircase of the mansion, the old man presently ushered young Herbert Clarendon into the sick room of his parent.

The Eton boy, whose sole knowledge of life had heretofore been bounded by the green fields that surrounded his college home, and the venerable walls of that classic pile, drew back as the mingled odours of life and death greeted him at the threshold; but the next moment, mastering his repugnance, he drew closer to his kind-hearted guide, and with a throbbing heart that all his boyish courage could not subdue, and a heightened colour, entered the chamber which was ere long to be the scene of the greatest mystery of our nature.

At the foot of the bed on which lay stretched the once gay and courtly Godfrey Clarendon, stood his elder son, a noble looking lad of eighteen, who was flanked on one side by a figure so singularly and outrageously original, that we feel it necessary to give a more than ordinarily particular account of its appearance, to place the

character before our reader's eye. A man's grey beaver hat, surmounted by a large purple feather, overlapped in its turn a face, the strong masculine features of which, scarred and wrinkled and badly treated as they had been by the finger of time, seemed to denote that it belonged to the masculine gender:—this, however, the remainder of the dress, which consisted of a scarlet boddice and a violet petticoat, the extreme scantiness of which by no means obscured a pair of very venerable yet still very well turned ancles, belied; a black military belt set with large brilliants that flashed out from the surrounding darkness whenever the light came in contact with them, white silk stockings with gold clocks and very low made shoes adorned with rosettes, and brilliants similar to those in the belt, a large gold watch attached to the side by an equally massive chain, and a very white thin India muslin handkerchief folded very low down over a flat bosom, so as to display all the beauties of a scraggy neck and throat diversified and intersected by a bundle of muscles and sinews, completes the

costume of this singular personage; in stature it equalled that of a tall man, the appearance of which, the masculine character of its features further tended to keep up; the nose was strong and hooked, the jaws large and prominent, and the eyes of a keen grey; there was with all this, when the features were at rest, an air of humour and caustic shrewdness that would in many people's minds have further increased the awe Lady Susan Clarendon's appearance created. But at times the withered, scarred, and weather-beaten old face became positively lovely with good-humour and benevolence; such gleams of sunshine were, however, it must be confessed, only passing glimpses of fair weather, and Lady Susan Clarendon in general was as cold and stately and immoveable as Snowdon or Helvellyn themselves. The great Pitt's niece, herself as great an eccentricity as the world ever produced, has declared that small hands, provided they are beautifully moulded and of an alabaster hue, are the most unfailing symbol of high birth; and, measured by this standard, Lady Susan was of the purest cast;

they were the only things about her that time had not marred, and now glittering with jewels of great value, they still served to remind the beholder of the time when the charms of their possessor challenged even the homage of the elegant Chesterfield, the courtly Etherege, the epigrammatic Selden, and the stately Dorset. A gold-headed cane, which, more from affectation than weakness, Lady Susan was fond of carrying with her, lay on an adjoining chair, and a beautiful Blenheim spaniel crouched at her feet, gazing wistfully into its mistress's face. Her ladyship was almost the only relation Mr. Clarendon possessed, and that only in a collateral degree: Mr. Clarendon's uncle, when in life, being the possessor of this old-fashioned oddity, and on this account chiefly, and partly because she had for a fortnight of every May carried off his only daughter to her dull, lumbering, melancholy house in Grosvenor Place, had she been summoned to the family conclave at this juncture.

One other relation the dying man possessed, whom never until now had he acknowledged in

that light; but when Godfrey Clarendon felt the cold hand of death upon him, and found that his midsummer friends of fashion and pleasure, one by one, fled his society; now that balls and fêtes and dinners were to be exchanged for the dull, drear seclusion of the sick room, and that he would never pass from thence but to his grave, he bethought him of this distant cousin, whose clumsy manners and unsophisticated expressions had been the object of his ridicule in the heyday of his prosperity; and Jasper Vernon, whom he remembered as a bashful, timid, uncouth looking, middle aged man, now stood at his bedside, after the lapse of a non-intercourse of twenty years, with square, gaunt shoulders, a lean cadaverous wrinkled face, adorned with a red hungry-looking snub nose, bleared eyes, a puckered-up chin, splayhands, a scratch wig, and a voice to the harsh dissonant tones of which the scarcely more mellifluous one of Lady Susan was melody itself.

From one dreary hour to another, Mr. Clarendon had been tossing and writhing on his weary

bed, racked without and within by the keenest pangs; now, however, when his eye fell on the trembling form and pale face of his younger son, he deigned to take some notice of what was passing around him—a condescension that all the cutting hints and inuendos and the clumsily put queries of his two elder relatives had not been able to elicit: he stretched out his arms, and Herbert, springing from Simpson's side, was about to throw himself upon his father's breast, when the two ancient worthies interposed.

“Clarendon, you're surely not going to kill the poor child,” yelled Lady Susan, seizing the innocent occasion of her fear by the skirts of his little tunic, and depositing him by main force in a chair; “my dear child, remember you've the death struggle on ye;——”

“Mr. Clarendon forgets his weak state,” echoed his other Job's comforter, pouring out a glass of some horrid mixture redolent of a thousand ills. “Pray drink the emulsion Dr. Quackleton——”

“Dr. Quackleton be d—d,” growled the patient

in a hoarse voice. "Herbert, my child, come to your father—"

"For shame, Godfrey Clarendon," groaned Lady Susan, keeping nevertheless a tight hold of the stripling with her iron grasp; "you that's just passing into another world, with the devil's curse on your lip! God forgive you your many and heavy sins."

"Mr. Clarendon had better be seeing the priest of the parish, than be after wearying his mind with carnal things," wheezed Jasper Vernon, with his cold, husky voice; "don't you think so, Lady Susan?"

"Humph! how should I know, you lantern-jawed noddy," growled her ladyship; "he'd better be after settling his affairs, in my opinion."

The dying man's eyes had beamed with a fierce light, during this miserable scene, so shamefully enacted in the very presence of death itself, by those whose birth and education, if not their feelings, should have taught them widely different. Now, however, a paroxysm of his disorder, more

violent than any he had hitherto experienced, came over him ; his breath came thick and hurried, his chest heaved convulsively, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, whilst large drops of sweat stood out like great beads on his pallid brow ; his features, pinched and wrinkled with pain, grew almost purple ; short, hurried sobs, burst from his tightly compressed lips ; the bed-clothes heaved and tossed with his convulsions, and after a few minutes passed in this dreadful state, during which Lady Susan and her coadjutor had retreated in dismay to a distant corner of the room, leaving only his own children and the faithful Simpson near him, nature once more resumed her sway, and Godfrey Clarendon, weak and speechless, sank back amongst his pillows, insensible, if not dead outright.

He was not dead, although so close to death itself was the swoon into which he had fallen, that his old servant for many anxious minutes dreaded that such was the case : restoratives of all sorts were administered, and here again the active genius of the Lady Susan Clarendon would infallibly have served her in good stead, once more,

had not the patient very suddenly and very contumaciously recovered himself so far as to sit up in bed and motion her to retire.

This, however, her ladyship was by no means disposed to do.

"I'm sure, my dear Mr. Clarendon, you're far too ill to be trusted alone," began she, in a high key; "you're just getting out of a dead swoon, which of itself is a very dangerous symptom, and I'm sure I can tell by your eyes and your complexion that your pulse is very high, and your symptoms are decidedly feverish, and you've got a very hectic cough;—there's nothing worse, Clarendon, than a hacking cough,—and your eyes are as red as fire,—and your nose—now, don't fidget and toss the clothes about in that way, Clarendon; your symptoms are all very bad, are they not, Mr. Vernon?"

"Oh, very! very bad indeed, Lady Susan—hem!" coughed that gentleman, whose red, drooping nose betrayed a predisposition to asthma; "Mr. Clarendon is very—ah hum!—yes, very ill;—pray, Lady Susan, take that child away; the little fellow only annoys our poor friend."

Lady Susan would fain have effected what Jasper Vernon dare not venture within the charmed circle himself to achieve; but there was a hectic glow on the brow of their dying host that awed even her daring spirit, and she only stood at a little distance from the bed, leaning on her cane, and watching with a keen, glittering eye, the painfully affecting little drama that was now going on before her.

"Herbert, my child, I know you're a brave little fellow for your age," said the dying man, in a totally changed voice; "you would not be a Clarendon, if you were not;" and a tone of proud feeling stirred his weary and flagging spirit as he spoke; "so listen to what I have to say:—you know that I'm dying," and, in spite of himself, a bitter smile overspread his haggard face, as he turned to where Lady Susan stood, "and in a few short hours you will lose a father's protection; it is for you, my child, more than for Cecil, that I regret this, for you are so young; but it is God's will, and He orders all for the right. Cecil will soon be a man, my boy, and then you will

look to him for the guidance which, for the present, I fear, you will have to receive at the hands of strangers;—don't cry, Herbert !”

“ Papa ! papa !” gasped the beautiful child, through his tears ; “ am I to live with that hideous old woman ?—oh, my own dear papa, I will go to heaven with you, rather ; oh pray don't leave me with that old woman,—I'm sure, papa, she's a witch.”

Lady Susan was speechless with passion ; she attempted to shake her gold-headed cane at the offending malapert, but her anger had entirely deprived her of strength, and she only stood as if rooted to the spot, growing every moment more hideous and more witch-like, in her vain attempt to find words to express her indignation.

“ My dear child, you must not say such naughty words :—Lady Susan is my aunt.”

“ And a pretty, oh, yes, a very pretty nephew I have got !—oh, dear ! what will become of me ?—I really think the world's mad !” gasped her ladyship ; “ to teach your child to malign your own flesh and blood in this way ; I won't be

treated in such a scandalous manner any longer.—Mr. Vernon, your arm, sir.—This is, without a parallel, the most audacious insult I ever had offered me.—Mr. Clarendon, I would wish to part friends, but, oh yes, I'm a witch,—a witch, I believe, Master Herbert!—oh dear!—oh dear!”—and gasping, groaning, sighing, and weeping, Lady Susan suffered herself, in all her injured innocence, to be led from the apartment.

“Simpson,” said Godfrey Clarendon, wearily, “lock that door, and stand before it until I have done.” And as his old servant obeyed, the dying man drew his elder son to him, and leaning his own aching head, racked with a thousand dying pangs, on the fine, manly breast of the young man, he said:—

“Cecil, you will be a man, if God spares you, whilst poor Herbert is still a boy:—can a dying father depend upon your filling his place to your brother when he is gone?”

The young lad stooped down, and kissed the cold, damp lips, of the dying man.

“God bless thee, my boy; I trust you. And

now one more word:—by your grandfather's will, the large property he left cannot be claimed until Herbert is of age; he was an eccentric man,—but in the lower drawer of my cabinet, the second from the corner, you will find a document, in which I have explained his will: it is for the use of both, though you, Cecil, can only at present understand it: the little fortune I possess is settled equally upon you, whilst that of your mother is secured to Eleanor. I give her into your protection, too, Cecil, though that old harridan will, I suppose, claim the sweet girl for the present.”

And at that moment, as if the mention of a woman's name had conjured her to the spot, a small side-door opened noiselessly, and a lovely girl, apparently about the same age as Cecil, with her beautiful glossy black hair hanging in dishevelled masses over a neck and shoulders of the purest ivory, her soft blue eyes bathed in tears, and her perfectly faultless Grecian features, that evidently, in happier hours, mantled with the bloom of the carnation, all pale and terror-stricken; her slender and perfectly Hebe-like figure but partially con-

concealed by the loose wrapper she had thrown over her; her beautiful little feet thrust into and but half concealed by the tiny slippers she had adopted in her haste,—in all this dishabille, which only made her look ten times more bewitching than the most studiously arranged *coiffure* could have done, Godfrey Clarendon's only daughter was by her father's side; the half air of drowsiness that all her agitation could not dispel, and more than all, the costume in which she appeared before him, betraying her having just risen from bed for that purpose.

"Nell, my love, you will catch cold," said her father, smiling proudly on her pallid beauty, for a single moment; "why did Waters allow you to know of this?"

"Waters could not help it, papa," said the young lady, striving to smile through her tears; "oh, why would you not permit me to nurse you?"

"It is all over now, Nell, love; it will be all the same in a few hours to Godfrey Clarendon. Go to your bed again, love: Cecil, give your sister your arm."

“Papa, I will not go. I am your daughter, your only daughter. Oh! don’t drive me away from you!” entreated the poor girl. “I see how very, very ill you are, and I will nurse you, only don’t drive me from you; for oh! you don’t know how dreadful it is to be awake all through the night, dreading a thousand things more terrible happening to you.”

“My dear Nell, you talk like an angel; but all the angels of heaven itself cannot help me now. I’m dying, my sweet love, dying! dying! Nell. My heart is cold; the blood lies like lead in my veins; I can scarcely see you, dearest—come nearer to me. Herbert! Cecil! where are you?”

His daughter, to whom every word he spoke was as the stab of a dagger, and who knew in him, as in fact did all his children, only the best of parents, encircled him in her arms. At that moment the faithful servant Simpson, who perceived that the last dread change was about to take place, left his post near the door, and joined the little group. Gently disengaging the young

lady from her position, he supported the fast sinking frame of his old master in his arms. Godfrey Clarendon opened his eyes for a moment and smiled serenely and peacefully upon them; his daughter stooped down and pressed her trembling lips on the clay-cold brow, and with the act Godfrey Clarendon's spirit escaped its shattered tenement of clay, and winged its flight to another world.

Could Guido, or the divine Raphael himself, have beheld that touching scene, as at that moment those three orphans, in all their unfolding and unripened beauty, knelt round that bed of death, with the mournful shadow of the old and faithful servant standing mournfully in the background; tears would have been drawn from many eyes, for centuries to come, on beholding the matchless picture the mighty master would have portrayed, and which a much weaker hand has vainly attempted to draw.

CHAPTER II.

CONFUSION, dismay, and regret reigned through Delaval Abbey when the news of Colonel Clarendon's death was communicated to the afflicted domestics. Every one, from the very lowest to the highest, from the meanest cinder-wench, and the broken-down whipper-in, to the portly steward, looked sad and disconsolate: for the very faults of their late benefactor appeared as so many virtues in the eyes of his dependants, now that he was about for ever to pass from amongst them; and loud and universal was the lamentation that accompanied him to the family vault in the parish church, in which the dust of so many of the Clarendons already reposed.

It was the evening of the day succeeding the funeral that Cecil Clarendon, gloomy, stern, and dispirited, joined the little party who, for the

sake of companionship, had assembled in the library, where, all seated round the ample grate, each one seemed silently absorbed in his own painful and sombre thoughts. A large lamp suspended from the ceiling, shed a rich, though by no means brilliant light over the little group, thus harmonising with the scene; and by its light, Jasper Vernon seemed busily engaged in writing several letters, which his newly acquired duties as guardian to Colonel Clarendon's family rendered necessary. Lady Susan was sitting bolt upright in her chair, her stern, harsh features and angular figure rendered tenfold more displeasing by the strangely fashioned mourning she wore. Her ladyship, contrary to her usual custom, seemed to be completely unoccupied, save and except that at intervals her keen eyes were fixed with a peculiar expression on the slender form of Eleanor Clarendon, who, with her beautiful glossy hair streaming over a dazzlingly fair arm, lay far back in the deep easy chair she occupied, her face buried in her hands, as if to shut out her thoughts from herself. Poor Herbert lay on

the hearth-rug, almost at the Lady Susan's feet, striving to amuse himself with an illuminated volume of Froissart; but the ever recurring yawn, the flushed cheek, and the restless changing of his position, betrayed his weariness of the task.

A magnificent Irish deer-hound, that had been a favourite with the colonel, had followed Cecil into the room; and the noble beast, who had been completely petted and spoiled by Eleanor, now walked wistfully to her chair, and thrust its cold nose against her hand.

Miss Clarendon started and looked up, and then throwing her arms round Bran's neck, she leaned her face on its head and burst into tears.

Lady Susan frowned, and kicked her own pug. Mr. Vernon glanced up from his letter; and the action, slight as it was, seemed to be understood, for her ladyship, after smoothing her wintry visage into a smile, crossed over to the young lady, and patting Bran on the head, took a chair next to that of Eleanor, and began to play the comforter.

“ You’re a fine fellow, good Brant, and proud enough you look of your privileges,” began she, smiling upon the hound; “there’s many a lord would give half his rent-roll to be in your place, my man, I promise you. Fie! Eleanor, Fie! child; you’ll cry your beautiful eyes out, and then, you know, I will scold you for ever after.”

A fresh burst of tears was the only response, and Lady Susan went on very sagely:—

“ The dead are beyond our sorrow, my love; all the tears that were ever shed cannot re-animate the lifeless dust.”

Eleanor sighed wearily as the truth of her ladyship’s words struck home to her mind. And then a fresh fit of weeping deprived her of the power of speech; and now, really afraid that this excessive grief might be the means of retarding their departure from Delaval, Lady Susan said, in a sterner voice,

“ You’ll throw yourself into a fever, child; excessive grief hurts the constitution very much. Come with me, my love, into my dressing room;

I have something to give you that you will cherish for the colonel's sake."

Eleanor staggered to her feet; but so much had excessive grief debilitated her, that she was compelled to lean on her aged and eccentric companion for support; Lady Susan did not summon a domestic, but reaching a small spirit lamp from the side table, passed into the picture gallery with a slow step; here there was a noble full-length portrait of Colonel Clarendon, dressed in uniform, and Lady Susan, pausing as she passed, held the lamp so as to throw the whole light on the noble features.

Eleanor's tear-stained face had fallen on her companion's breast; a deep sigh burst from her overcharged heart, as memory busied itself with the past, and then, as if spell-bound, she stood rooted to the spot, whilst her companion, sinking her voice almost to a whisper, poured forth, as if unconsciously, a long admiring record of the gallant deeds of 'Godfrey Clarendon, interspersing her narrative with reminiscences of his courtship and marriage, the birth of Cecil, and

Eleanor's own christening; until the poor girl enticed, unawares, into the toils of the temptress, stood with the generous tears in her beautiful eyes, wondering how she could ever deem those scarred, weather-beaten features, hideous, or that harsh voice, grating to her ears.

"But we are wasting our time here, my sweetest," said the old lady, with her last sigh for Godfrey Clarendon; "in my cabinet I dare say we shall find a precious hoard of love-letters from your dear father to Mrs. Clarendon. I know they will be gold itself to his daughter, and you're freely welcome to such silly things. I always tossed my Mr. Clarendon's letters into the fire without reading them; but every one doesn't take their love so much on trust as I did."

At another time Eleanor would have laughed outright at such a speech from Lady Susan; now, however, the luxury of obtaining possession of an old bundle of letters, written by her father, filled her thoughts, to the exclusion of everything besides, and she only sighed again.

They had now gained Lady Susan's boudoir, and here her Ladyship, depositing her lamp on a table, began to rummage in her drawers for a key tied by a black string to a red morocco heart. Every drawer was ransacked for such a treasure, but without effect; and Lady Susan, who was as active as any hoyden of sixteen, was presently diving under the drawers, to see if by any accident it could have taken refuge there, and then peering with her sharp nose over the top, like a hideous nightmare, and knocking work-boxes and baskets about in a perfect phrenzy, until the missing article was safely rolled out from the very last place in the world it should have been in; and Lady Susan triumphantly unlocked her cabinet, and produced a small roll of brown discoloured papers, which, on being opened, proved to be the letters in question.

"There, take them, child, take them, they're all your own," cried Lady Susan, thrusting them together, with a beautiful miniature, into Eleanor's passive hands. "Ah, he was a comely man, was the colonel, when that was done.

Now, my dove, away with you to your room, and never let me see the trash more." And with a gesture of impatience that Eleanor thought was only feigned, Lady Susan drove her from the room, and double-locked the door after her.

Had the young girl seen the withering scorn that distorted those scarred features the next moment, she would have shrunk from the fate that was before her. For many minutes after her departure, her ladyship, with her hands rightly clasped, every feature in her haughty face expressing the loathing hatred she felt at her heart, her small grey eyes flashing fire, and her shoulders swaying convulsively backwards and forwards, stood like one of Retzsch's demons, muttering his horrid spells over the destruction he has just commenced; her very being itself absorbed in the one thought that had now taken possession of her soul—the passion of revenge.

Suddenly smoothing her haggard brow, she rang her bell, and resuming her habitual cold smile, demanded of her maid, who presently entered—

“ Morris, did you take care to leave the letter I gave you at the post-office, as you passed through the village?”

“ Oh yes, my lady,” rejoined the confidential abigail, who was almost as grey and withered as her mistress, “ I left it first.”

“ You did not put it into Mr. Clarendon’s bag?” demanded her ladyship, who appeared more anxious about the matter than such a trifle seemed to warrant; “ you are quite sure, Morris?”

“ Quite sure, Lady Susan. You particularly desired me not to put it into the bag.”

“ Very well, you may go. I will ring when I want you to undress me—stay; send a footman to desire Mr. Vernon to come here.”

Morris went her way, and Lady Susan, taking a folded paper from her pocket, opened it, and was deeply absorbed in the contents, when Jasper Vernon entered, unannounced, and approached her chair.

Lady Susan looked up, and this time she did not consider it worth her while to wreath her soured visage with smiles.

“I am going to leave here to-morrow,” she said, after a short pause. “Eleanor must go with me, as I have to be entrusted with the precious charge of unfolding her future destiny, ha! ha!”

“Hem! you are in a hurry to be off, Lady Susan,” said Vernon, glancing hurriedly around the room; “will not Miss Clarendon—”

“Miss Clarendon, in future, must yield her wishes to mine, sir,” said Lady Susan; “I cannot travel far in a day, and it will, probably, be a week before we get to Leven Castle, so that is settled; and now tell me what you intend doing with the lads; of course, this place has to be shut up until Herbert—I hate that boy even worse than his brother!—attains his majority; you pack him off to school again, so that he is easily disposed of: but the elder brother, he is a more difficult subject to manage; what becomes of him, Jasper; he can’t be sent to school?”

“To begin at the beginning,” said Jasper Vernon, in the disagreeable snuffling tone he usually spoke with; “Delaval has to be let for nine years;

what a pity we cannot sell it ! The colonel's will expressly declares that Herbert remains at Eton till sixteen, and then goes to college ; he is handsomely provided for until he is twenty-one, when the sealed packet, found in the colonel's bureau, directed to a man of the name of Dalton, will be opened here, when that day arrives : this is now the 9th of October, 1831 ; on the 7th of January, 1840, Herbert will be of age ; and, on the night of that day, at seven o'clock in the evening, the four parties named in the last codicil of the colonel's will, or the survivors of them, that is, you, Lady Susan, this Edward Dalton, myself, and Simpson—

“ The colonel's steward ? ”

“ The same—are to meet in the blue drawing-room.”

“ Ah,—his wife died in that room,” muttered Lady Susan, half aloud.

“ Humph ! and in the presence of the four the packet has to be opened at the time specified ; and Cecil, Herbert, and Eleanor Clarendon, who are also to be present, have, in attorney's *parlance*, to

be made acquainted with something to their advantage."

"What an eccentric Clarendon was!" said her ladyship, frowning; "and Cecil, what becomes of him?"

"Goes to the devil, for aught I know to the contrary—the colonel leaves him ten thousand pounds, and the like sum is left to Miss Clarendon, independent of what may accrue to either of them. Cecil at once becomes his own master, and I only remain nominal guardian of Herbert until the return of this Edward Dalton from India, or Jericho, or the backwoods of America, or wherever he may chance to be at the present moment of which we are speaking,—he may be climbing the pyramids, or groping in the tomb of the Sultan Mahmoud at Constantinople, or smoking his chibouque in the Valley of Sweet Waters, or singing chorusses with the charcoal-burners of the Black forest, or eating black bread and chalots with the fishermen of the Danube; for he's the most strange, unaccountable, out of the way being in the civilized world. No one knows what was

his influence over the colonel, yet that it was very great, no one in their senses would doubt for a moment. Report says, he has looked at life from every possible point of view—has lived for months with the red-men of the rocky mountains, joined in their religious ceremonies, gone on the war-path, smoked the pipe of peace in the full assembly of two contending nations, and paddled his bark-canoe over the waters of the mighty Huron; and then, when the few who remembered him here at home, thought he was dead, he has suddenly started up almost at the antipodes, making the world ring with his exploits; when attacked by banditti in the Campagna of Rome, wounding, maiming, and perhaps killing three-fourths of his assailants, and himself escaping unscathed, with his servant, from their net;—he is, in short, one of the most singular and unaccountable beings on the face of the earth, and had he lived a couple of hundred years ago, Edward Dalton, as he styles himself, would infallibly have been burned for necromancy.”

“A perfect Machiavel, by your account,” cried

Lady Susan, with a stern smile ; “ and pray what is the appearance of this Protean hero.”

“ That of course is as varied as the hundred disguises he chooses to assume,—he has been a Bedouin, a Copt, a Turk, a Spanish priest, a Swedish peasant, a Scottish Highlander, and most singular of all, and which fits him as readily as the rest, an English country gentleman. When he assumes the latter, which is the only one I know, he then appears a tall, robust, athletic man of forty, with a swarth face, sharp, clear-cut features, an eye as keen as a hawk’s, a well-shaped mouth, a sonorous voice, chestnut hair, but without any whiskers ; he wears a short, well-trimmed beard, probably from his long residence in cold countries, though I have heard it is to conceal an oval-shaped mole he has the misfortune to be possessed of ; his nose is slightly hawked, and adds singularly to the commanding dignity of his features, and when he is incensed, his nostrils ——”

“ Hold ! for mercy’s sake forbear, sir,” cried Lady Susan, striving to laugh, as she started up from her chair, though the moment before, the

colour had fled her cheek, and blanched it like alabaster; "you have given me materials enough for a dozen portraits, and if you say one word more, Vernon, I shall really fancy this Edward Dalton is a bugbear of your own heated imagination. I have heard quite enough, and you may depend upon it will neither expose myself nor Eleanor Clarendon to the fascination of such a Mephistopheles. I really believe I'll dream of this Wandering Jew, if Morris succeeds in reading me to sleep at all, so good-night! come to my dressing-room early, as I have much to say to you before we part—and now go and finish your letters."

Vernon bowed, and withdrew without another word; he did not even smile, as he shook Lady Susan's trembling hand, and his features wore the same impassive expression they always had, when he returned to the library to think over the work he had yet to do.

The fire had burned low during his absence, and the lamp had gone out, so that when he threw himself into the same chair poor Eleanor had so

recently occupied, he at once imagined himself to be alone ; presently, however, something stirred, and a gleam of light flashing from the grate enabled him to perceive Cecil, sitting, either asleep or buried in thought, on the opposite side : he had apparently never changed his posture since Vernon quitted the room, and it was not without an astonished start, that the latter, recurring to the conversation he had just held with Lady Susan, imagined for a moment that he beheld the stern, determined look, eagle glance, and bronzed features of that very Edward Dalton himself ; it was only for a moment ; the next instant the shape melted into the equally stern face of Cecil Clarendon, and Jasper Vernon smiling at his own fancies, stirred the dying embers, and coughed aloud.

One of the two actions aroused Cecil, who, to his companion's intense astonishment, plunged at once into an explanation, that for many reasons he had wisely intended deferring until the morrow.

"Delaval has to be let, sir?" he said, interrogatively.

Jasper Vernon fancied the young man's voice

faltered, as he put the question ; it might be only fancy after all, but the firelight, at that moment, leaped up, and showed him the stern, pale, brow-knit face of the young man fixed upon him : Vernon thought of Edward Dalton again ; he couldn't for the life of him imagine why he did so, for it all passed through his mind like a flash of lightning, even before he had time to answer Cecil's question, which he did, half in a dream ; " Yes ! yes ! Delaval has to be let ; we will get a handsome rental, yes ! yes ! and you—"

" And I—yes, sir, that is what is to me of the most moment ; Eleanor, I know, leaves to-morrow with Lady Susan—ha ! you start, and yet you cannot contradict me."

Jasper Vernon was in a dream still ; it was very strange, he knew himself all the while that he was a keen man, as keen as a gimlet, and yet here he was at midnight, falling into a sound sleep, whilst a beardless stripling opposite was talking in an authoritative tone, of his future destiny to him ! and he was Colonel Clarendon's executor, and that young man's present guardian

too! Jasper Vernon was in a dream, from which he strove in vain to awake, for he could only mutter, like a drowsy man; "Does Lady Susan go to-morrow?"

"To be sure she does, sir; you ought to know that, when my sister Eleanor has to accompany her."

Jasper Vernon's usually stern manner sank before the searching gaze of the young man; he felt that he was playing a hypocrite's part, and yet with a miserable show of innocence, he tried to look down the half scornful smile he saw playing around his companion's lips, and failed wofully in the attempt: "I—I did hear Lady Susan say, that is, I believe her ladyship intends setting off as early as she can," he stammered out at length.

"Very well, sir; it is perhaps better that the parting should be as speedy as possible," said the young man with a swelling heart; "I too will leave to-morrow, sir, and leave you here alone, though not to follow my sister, dearly and fondly as I love her."

Vernon felt as if he could shrink into a nutshell; he felt himself growing palpably smaller, more insignificant, more contemptible every moment, and yet he could not, although he strove to do so, take his gaze from the proud withering features of Cecil; he felt fascinated, in spite of himself, awed, subdued, and terrified as he was; and all this while, Cecil Clarendon continued to speak in an excited, hurried, yet determined tone, as if his long pent-up feelings, like a stream bursting through its barriers, had at last found vent, and were quickly hurrying him towards a goal which Jasper Vernon shuddered to behold, even from a distance.

“And mark me, Mr. Vernon,—for between you and me there shall be no disguising of our thoughts,—I know Lady Susan Clarendon and yourself too well to expect that you will strive to make her feel that in acquiring your protection she will not regret that of her father. No, sir! I can dive below the flimsy veil of courtesy with which you fondly fancy you conceal your true purposes, and I need no wizard’s power to

acquaint me that under your protection Eleanor will be exposed to many and bitter trials. But beware, sir! think before you act! ponder long and wisely before you venture to turn and twist Eleanor Clarendon's destiny to advance your own unhallowed schemes; and remember! aye, remember, Mr. Vernon, that I shall ever watch over her fate, and that, however distant I may be, retribution shall be speedy and terrible."

"Mr. Clarendon!—such language!" stammered Jasper Vernon, "I really am quite paralysed—Sir!"

"One word more, sir," said Cecil, pale with excitement; "I know that Eleanor will never consent to work out your miserable ends by consenting to an alliance with any man, whether rich or poor, without consulting me. I warn you of this beforehand, that you may not dare to tamper with her; and if I ever hear of a change in her, I will know to whom to assign it, and my bitter vengeance shall fall upon them. And now, good-night, Mr. Vernon," added the young man, rising, with a stern frown; "my

father's legacy to me—I will not call it my fortune—can be paid into his solicitor's hands; you will not see me again until the appointed seventh of January, 1840,* unless something happen to those whom I love the most dearly in the world; in that case you will be responsible for their misfortunes. I will take my leave of Eleanor and Herbert, in the morning. My servant will stay behind to remove the very few effects I can call my own: the roan hunter my father gave me on my birth-day, a couple of greyhounds, and a Manton, are perhaps all I am entitled to. For the rest, I must be beholden to the liberality of Mr. Vernon, by whom I have little fear of being liberally treated."

There was a bitter scorn in Cecil's words, that gnawed into his auditor's very soul, and yet there he sat, spell-bound, speechless, and terrified, without daring to utter one word during the interview. He sat quite stupified, gazing on the young man, whose prematurely athletic well-knit figure seemed to dilate and expand with the intensity of his emotions. Twice or thrice

he essayed to speak, but the words died in a husky rattle in his throat. The half smothered firelight scarcely sufficed to show the alternating emotions that passed in rapid succession over Cecil's handsome features; Jasper felt strangely humiliated by being thus bearded by a mere stripling, in the house of which he was—yes, he himself the executor of Colonel Clarendon—at present the rightful owner: and yet when Cecil had strode indignantly out of the room without uttering another word in farewell, he had not breath left to utter an anathema on his departure.

CHAPTER III.

HIS own emotions, or rather the exhibition into which those emotions had hurried him, prevented Cecil from sleeping much that night. The last few hours had transformed him, as if by magic, from a bold, merry, thoughtless youth, into a determined, haughty man. He felt as if the spirit of that revered parent, whose death still shed a heavy gloom over his feelings, had been transferred to himself, and called upon him to venture his manhood for the sake of those whose youth or sex rendered them more defenceless and unprotected than himself; he felt happy and sad by turns,—now a strange thrill of gratified pride stirred his heart, as he remembered his interview with Jasper Vernon,—and anon the tears swelled in his eyes, as he remembered that a few short

hours would leave Eleanor and Herbert exposed to the tender mercies of the very being whom he had so lately denounced in terms the most exasperating to the self-love of that gentleman.

He was awakened early by Herbert, who burst into his room, eager to carry him to the stables to see Cecil's hunter, and his own pony, take their first canter over the park. Herbert pouted a little, when Cecil told him gently to go by himself, and meet him, with Bran and Fairstar, Cecil's greyhounds, at the hermitage; but the next moment, as if ashamed of such a childish action, the young boy turned, as he was leaving the room, and rushing into Cecil's arms, flung himself upon his neck, and sobbed as if his heart would break.

"My dear Herbert," said Cecil, striving to assume a gay tone; "you are as bad as a boarding-school girl this morning; there now, go! Nell and I will meet you at the hermitage in an hour's time, and as I am not going to come back here to-day, you must bring me the dogs, for I want them."

He threw back the curly brown hair that overshadowed Herbert's fair sunny brow, and returning the poor fellow's embrace with an earnestness which the young Eton lad knew not the bitterness of, heard him the next moment running gaily along the gallery, uttering a merry whoop, as he crossed the quadrangle on his way to the stables.

Cecil looked at his watch, and found that it still wanted a quarter of an hour to the time when he had requested Eleanor to be ready to walk to the Hermitage with him, and the interval he consumed in arranging everything about his room for his own departure; his guns were already in their flannel-cases, his foils, the sword his father had given him by an Indian rajah whose life he had saved at the peril of his own; his fishing-rods, in themselves various enough to furnish a rod-maker's shop, albeit it were kept by Izaak Walton himself, with the apparatus of his trade; all those weapons of the turf or the chase, with which young men love to be surrounded, were already packed up. Cecil sighed as he


beheld the change the well-known snugly furnished room presented; the books all taken down from the heavily carved oak cases, and packed in strongly corded boxes; the beautiful cabinet Lawrence portraits of his father and mother, and Herbert, taken from their panels and packed with the rest. Eleanor's miniature lying on the table ready for him to place the string round his neck, his riding-whip lying beside it; all spoke of change, and absence, and partings; of leaving the home of his boyhood and youth, of parting from Eleanor, of his father; and with a bursting heart Cecil muttered what might be either a prayer or a farewell, and rushed from the room, without daring to trust himself with another look.

The cold air revived him as he emerged from the house and bent his steps towards an alcove in the shrubberies where Eleanor had told him she would await him. As he hurried on the poor young man strove to assume an air of gaiety, but it was with a sad feeling of despair, and the smile died on his lips, and his heart beat

against his breast, as the alcove rose ~~into~~ view amongst the trees.

Eleanor appeared on the steps as he approached ; her complexion was as colourless as alabaster, and though her eyes were heavy with recent tears, and her whole appearance betrayed the grief she felt, yet in Cecil's eyes she was perfectly beautiful ; her hair fell in a black mass over her shoulders, and aided the pallid beauty of her features, which, in their exquisite moulding, reminded you of a lovely Magdalen of Correggio or Guido ; her graceful shape was set off to the utmost advantage by the simple morning dress she wore, and all this pallid beauty was rendered the more bewitching when, without a syllable being exchanged on either side, the high-souled girl flung herself into his arms, and hung, sobbing bitterly, on his neck.

"My dear Nell ! now fie on thee for trying to shake my courage, dearest," said Cecil, carrying more than leading her, from the alcove ; "here's a poor fellow on the point of setting out into the world to push his fortunes, and trying to

carry  brave heart with him, and then, when he is parting with the only creature who perchance cares for him in all the wide world, the silly girl gives way to her grief, and——”

“Cecil! Cecil!” sobbed Eleanor, leaning heavily on his arm.

“Nay, my dear Eleanor, I will scold for once; you ought really to put a better heart into a poor fellow than you do; remember I am going into the world to push my fortunes; will you not say, God speed you, Cecil, at parting?”

“A thousand times, Cecil,” sobbed Eleanor; “but of you I have no fear; you are brave, noble, and generous, and these ever win their way in the world; yes, Cecil, with you the struggle may be severe, but it will be short and glorious; but for me--oh! Cecil, would not you, with your brave heart, shrink from a fate such as mine will be?”

“Eleanor,” said Cecil, encircling her waist with his arm, and speaking in a more than usually solemn tone; “you are going to live under the protection, or, in other words, be given up to

the tender mercies of Lady Susan Clarendon, than whom, in my opinion, there lives not a more detestable creature in the world; but let not this terrify you, for whatever befalls me, I shall always have the power to rescue you from her clutches should she dare to make you subservient to her own interested purposes; it is no sudden prejudice that has blinded me to her true character, for it is the conviction of years, but even this need not terrify you; at any time you can leave her protection and confide yourself to me, or to Dalton, should he return to this country before such a step become necessary."

Eleanor smiled through her tears. "Ah! Cecil, how famously we would keep house together; we are quite rich, we have twenty thousand pounds, and why should we not make the attempt?"

"At present, Nell, such a scheme could not be put into effect; let us try the fate providence seems to point out for us to follow; and then Dalton may arrive in a month—his agents at Lisbon, New York, Rome, and Paris have been

written to on our account, and, no doubt, when he hears all, he will at once set out for England—he may be in this country even now; and then, if we should take any rash step without his sanction——”

“ Ah, Cecil, how wise and circumspect you grow,” sighed Eleanor; “and our poor father always thought you such a reckless harebrain !”

“ Circumstances will make even a madman cool, Nell,” said Cecil, smiling; “remember how many fates are placed in my hands—yours, Herbert’s and my own—I ought to be a perfect Socrates!—and then, Dalton——”

“ I have really reasoned myself into the belief that he is only a creation of poor papa’s, Cecil; the account we have always heard of him is so wild and mysterious—his wandering manner of life, the many tales of his eccentricities—his prodigality and parsimony, so strangely mingled, his many disguises, his romantic escapades,—are all so many evidences in my own mind against his being a real, living, breathing mortal, like ourselves.”

“And yet he is really and truly what he is represented to be, Eleanor!” said Cecil, gravely.

“Ah! they tell you so, and you believe them——”

“Oh, no; I have actually seen him!” said the young man, almost sternly. “Listen! once when I was little more than a child, almost the very first thing I can remember to have happened to me in my life, when I slept in the little green bed-room, through my father’s—you remember when I had that room, Eleanor?”

“Perfectly!” said Eleanor, drawing in her breath, and clinging closer to her companion; “you once lowered yourself from the window, down into the great pear tree that grew just below, to get me a cap full of pears, whilst I stood shivering and crying on the window-sill, lest you should lose your hold, and break your neck, for my idle whim.”

“Girls are always cowards, Eleanor; however, just after I was put into possession of that room, and when mamma was lying dangerously ill, I was awakened one night by hearing voices and

footsteps about my bed. I was a mere child at the time, and, like all children, had my head filled with ghost stories, and such like, so that at first I felt terribly frightened, and crept under the bed-clothes."

"Are you going to tell a ghost story, Cecil?"

"No, no;—something quite as wonderful, though. Well, the next moment a hand was laid on the bed-clothes, which were roughly snatched aside, and then, looking up, I perceived my father and another man, whom I afterwards found to be this Edward Dalton, standing over me. I had little time to observe him; and then I was, as you must remember, a mere child, for in a second, they retreated a step, and a beautiful being——"

"My dear Cecil, you have been dreaming," said Eleanor, smiling; "this never can have happened?"

"But it did, though, as I'll presently convince you,—but don't interrupt my narrative. My father and Dalton fell back, forming a sort of background to the lovely apparition that suc-

ceeded them. Eleanor, I have seen many beautiful faces, many exquisite shapes, felt many a bright eye light up the darkness of my soul—yet, child as I was, I never can forget the mournful beauty of that face which hung over my boyish pillow, on that memorable night; they were the features of one whom, once seen, you can never forget; I can only remember the exquisite fairness of her complexion,—the 'dark full eyes, swimming with tears,—the purple blackness of the hair, that fell in dishevelled masses over the snowy neck, and the black velvet dress fitting closely to the bosom throbbing with grief,—all this I can remember, and also the agonizing kiss she imprinted on my brow, and the solemn entreaty of her voice; as she spoke a few hurried, agonizing words to my father, in a language I did not understand, but which seemed to have a powerful effect on him, by the reply they produced; then her scarcely less singular companion came forward; and, though he did not kiss me, the eager scrutiny to which he subjected me, proved how great was his interest, and then the

three seemed to depart—at least I fancied so; and I was again falling asleep, when I was again aroused, and the same lips were pressed once more upon my forehead—a sob followed—the door closed upon her, and it was all over!—”

Cecil came to a full stop as he closed his narrative; he had spoken with so much earnestness, that his auditor felt that it must be the truth—he never could have dreamed it; and so it was several moments before she could ask—“And this beautiful being, Cecil, did you never discover who she was?”

“Never! Several years after, when alone with my father, after our dear mother’s death, I asked him who she was, and how her fate was connected with that of Edward Dalton, or with mine?”

“And what did he say?”

“For a moment he looked as if he could strike me to the ground, and then, in a voice almost inarticulate with some strange emotion, told me, as I valued my existence, never to breathe a syllable of the occurrence to human ears. For weeks after, he was gloomy, and absorbed in

thought ; and I fancied he seemed to avoid me as much as he possibly could."

"That could only be the effect of your own imagination, Cecil !"

"I've thought so since, at times ; but, however, the whole affair has only served to convince me, that this Edward Dalton and his companion are in some way very mysteriously connected with our family—But here comes Herbert, riding my horse, followed by Cruddace, with the dogs ! and now, my dear Nell, I must say that saddest and bitterest of words—good-bye ! it may be for a short time, and it may be for a very long one."

"Oh, no—no !" sighed Miss Clarendon, clinging closer to her brother ; "not for years, Cecil ! I cannot—cannot live without seeing you so long ; remember, we have never been parted for months before !"

Cecil kissed her brow. "It was cruel of me to talk in such a manner ; whatever befalls me, I will, at all hazards, see you twice a year, if not more frequently ; and rest assured, Nell, that if that woman does not treat you with proper

attention and respect,—her stony heart cannot let her love even such sweetness and gentleness as yours,—my unsleeping vigilance will at once discover it, and I will at once, dearest, be your champion and avenger.”

It was a touching sight to see those two young creatures—one, so beautiful in her shrinking modesty and youth—the other, so proudly brave in his untamed and unchecked early manhood. Ah! who would not exchange all the wealth, and fame, and honours of after years, when the heart has learned to distrust, and to tremble for the future, and to sigh over the past, for that short and fleeting vision of confidence, when our own single hand and our own good cause were thought to be all powerful! When life has opened too recently upon our dazzled senses, for the rainbow tints with which fancy has decked and embellished it, for sated experience to have discovered how empty and unreal are half the imaginary joys of existence; when the halcyon wings of hope are not yet stricken in their flight, and the first sweet draught of the cup of pleasure

is but just pressed to the lips, that will, in after times, turn away with loathing, and bitterness, and despair.

And Cecil Clarendon hoped bravely for the future. He was young! Oh, youth, how art thou cheated out of the sweets of thy bright vernal dream by the hard, gripping, weary world, to have thy memory, the memory of a shadow, embalmed in the dreams of age; he was strong and healthy; and Cecil himself knew that nature had gifted him with a fine figure and handsome features; his talents were of the first order; he was gentle, and brave, and generous; he had ten thousand pounds, and a horse, the like of which, for swift-ness and docility, was not to be met with in all the wide county of merry Shropshire, and, above all, the world was all before him, where to choose his adventures.

“And you are going, Cis,” said Herbert, pouting, as was his habit, when he was grieved, “going to leave us, Cis,—for ever, perhaps?—and poor I, have to go back to-day, with Simpson, to that stupid Eton,—Cis, can’t you

get me off being sent there, and take me with you?—I love the fresh air, and the green fields, and the dogs, so well!”

“You’ll be a man soon, Herbert,” said Cecil, smiling “and then we’ll live like a couple of merry outlaws ‘in the forest green;’ in the mean time you must read hard, and master Latin and Greek!”

Herbert eyed Cecil’s hunter, and the two greyhounds, who were bounding merrily after each other in a paddock, into which they had pushed their investigations, with a rueful frown; they were such a striking contrast to the fate that was awaiting him, that he could scarcely keep down the tears that were rising; and even when Cecil promised to come and see him on his birth-day, which would be in a month, poor Herbert’s grief was little less violent, although it all spent itself internally.

“Cecil, let us part here,” said Eleanor, in a whisper; “it’s only misery to prolong it further—God bless you! and—and—if—Cecil, bear with me!—if I should want your protection——”

"You shall have it, almost before the wish is framed in your heart!" said Cecil in a husky voice; "Now don't cry, Nell!"

"I know I'm a poor silly thing, Cecil," said Eleanor, looking up, with a bright smile shining through her tears, "but I've a sad foreboding!"

"Nothing but nonsense!" said the brother; "who could harm you, Nell—you, that are so gentle and so good?"

"Lady Dipah is a hag, Nell!" interposed Herbert, with boyish vehemence; "I'd almost rather go to Eton, as"—

"Silence, Herbert!" said his brother, sternly; "one more kiss, Nell—there! there! now—now!—give me one smile at parting, to speed me on my way, dearest!—one word of hopeful trusting in our meeting again happily at last,—one bright look, the remembrance of which may act as a charm when I am weary, or sad, or dispirited;" and the young man, folding her in his arms, pressed her to his breast, in a wild tumult of grief and affection, imprinted one burning kiss on her fainting lips, and then, with

a wild, half-smothered cry, and a pang at his heart, resigned his hold, and, springing into the saddle, spurred his horse, gave one hurried look back, and, followed by his dogs, was out of sight in a moment.

The poor girl stood for several minutes in a state of stupefaction, scarcely conscious that Cecil had, indeed, departed; she still felt the burning kiss he had imprinted on her lips, the hurried embrace in which she had for a moment been pressed to his heart,—the farewell, so fervently spoken, still rang in her ears, and yet, when Herbert, half reproachfully, touched her hand, and dragged, rather than led her along the path, a cold shudder ran through her frame; she felt the same agonizing sense of benumbed pain a person, in whom life has been suspended, may be supposed to feel, when once more recalled to existence;—her brain reeled with sensations, to which it had heretofore been a stranger; nothing bore the same aspect it had done before,—the very sun shone with a sickly smile over the

wintry landscape,—Eleanor Clarendon had begun to learn to distrust.

“Ah, Nell, you almost make me cry to look at you,” said Herbert, who, having already half swallowed his grief, very reasonably thought his sister had had time to do the same; “one would really think you had just parted with a lover—and yet, it is only Cecil, after all!”

A pang shot through Eleanor’s heart; she blushed, and walked on, for some time, with a quicker step. It was strange that so young a child should have stumbled on a fact that was not known even by herself; and Herbert Clarendon began to chase the gardener’s terrier over the flower-beds.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a wild yet magnificent night for those whose worship has been laid on the high altar of nature. Masses of great forest trees, each standing out singly—vast, grand, and sombre—from its neighbours; the sharp, crisp, merry blast now swaying its mighty branches, now sighing round the knotted, scarred, and wide-girthed trunk, and anon flying up, with a loud angry swoop, to the very topmost twigs, tearing down many a rotten branch and many a withered leaf in its uproarious ascent, and in a moment booming away to some dark, ferny dell, where the deer lay with their heads to windward, snuffing every puff of wind as it blew over them. It was a glorious night. The sky was studded with silver stars, for there was no moon, and every planet shone

down upon the earth as if with an eye of love. The very wind itself, so blusteringly strong, seemed to possess a mysterious influence on the senses. There was a wild, majestic music in the fierceness with which it mounted the neighbouring hill, battling its way amidst clouds of leaves through the forest trees, dodging round sly turnings and windings of the lonely road, and then bearing down with its wild music over that same road, when the way was straight and level and even enough for such a lawless wind, until it came upon the odd, dark, grim, sly-looking hut just under a huge, aldermanic-looking plane-tree, which spread its mighty, leafless, arms far and wide, as if proud of sheltering the black, dismal fungus underneath.

A fungus! Never did a scarred, weather-beaten, ugly face more effectually give the lie to the honest, manly heart that, let the world say what it pleases to the contrary, beats beneath it, as frequently, or more so, than under a fair and comely visage. There had been many a merry wassail, many a jovial, laughter-ringing, side-

aching, meeting under its ugly roof; often and often had its shapeless walls groaned with all the good things they had heard (for walls have ears); and the fungus had pretty sharp ears, too, and looked, forsooth, as if all it had heard and been a witness to had driven it for long out of all symmetry or shape, leaving it to a frosty old age of uncouth distorted strength.

The fungus had a chimney: not one of your trim, dapper, slim, and slender-made beauties of brick and mortar, that like a town-bred exquisite looks as if swathed in stays and laced into an excruciatingly elegant willow-wand, and out of the top of which no honest puff of sea-coal smoke could ever find its way,—but a short, squat, sturdy affair, that looked as if it had been snubbed in the builder's mind before ever it was a chimney at all, and had never got its growth after,—and out of this besnubbed and ill-treated funnel there was at this moment a broad blast of smoke pouring forth, as if the occupants of the grim, suspicious-looking hut were about to make a night of it, as they had done many a night before, and

would do so again. The roof had once been thatched, but that was many a long year ago, and the velvety moss had grown stealthily over it for many a long day, and even that had lost its bright green tint, and had changed to black, as if to be in keeping with every thing about it. The door was of oak, and had a pair of hinges that might have done duty, as far as strength went, for a cathedral; and the door itself, as if to second the hospitality of its owner, had an odd trick of always swinging open, and open it now was, as if in sheer mockery of the bitter cold night, emitting through its porily limits a broad ruddy stream of flame upon the dark road and the still darker forest beyond.

If the hut was 'so odd, and uncouth, and unearthly, without, it was scarcely less so within. It contained but two rooms, or rather only one, with a slight recess at one end. A wood fire blazed merrily upon the hearth, sending up a shower of sparks into the wide yawning chimney; a long, deep settle ran almost quite along one side of this apartment, in front of which stood a

sturdy beech-tree table. The atmosphere was impregnated with a mingled fume of tobacco-smoke, liquor, and the frying of bacon, which now was frizzling over the cheerful fire, whilst the three men who occupied the hut lay far back on the settle, holding a desultory conversation, that sometimes was earnest and vivid, but more frequently was monosyllabic and taciturn as ever conversation could be, and which at last died away altogether, leaving its supporters with their dark, weather-beaten faces, turned towards the ruddy fire.

There was a fourth man, whose office it seemed to be to superintend the cooking of the supper; he was a short, thick-set, arch-looking little fellow, with an imperturbably good-humoured smile on his chubby, marbly face; eyes as small and bright as beads were deep set in his head; his hair was black and bristly as that of a wild boar; an excrescence in the centre of his face, like a bottled mushroom, served him for a nose, the smallness of which was most amply compensated for by a mouth that seemed as if it had stretched itself to its utmost possible limits, to admit all the

good things it had swallowed in the course of its existence; there was, in fact, an unctuous, sleek, oily look about this little fellow, with his sly, comical, merry face, his short, thick-set body, and his sturdy bow-legs, that won upon you at the first glance. His features had nothing sinister and deceitful in them; they looked, in fact, the personal property of a man whose whole mind is centred in the good things of this life, and in this respect nature told no lie,—the face was the index to the mind.

“Hollo, Bams!” roared the man who sat farthest from the fire, raising himself up from his lounging posture on the settle, “is that confounded frizzle, frizzle, frizzle, never going to come to an end? how long are we hungry fellows to wait for our suppers?”

“Gently, gently, Jacob Rudd,” rejoined Bams, looking over his shoulder, as he gave the collop another turn, “one turn more, my good Jacob, and——”

“Oh, never mind the turn, Bams,” growled Rudd, turning round, and assuming a posture

that displayed his brawny, muscular figure, in all its perfection; "come, lad, throw your old frying-pan into a corner, and let's to meat. I'm as hungry as a starved wolf, after it's been a week in a trap. Ha! ha! ha!"

Bams laughed at the same moment, and even in this there was a singular contrast in the two men: Bams laughed with an oily sound gurgling down his throat, his little round face crinkled into a huge smile, and all dotted and mottled with round red spots, where wrinkles should be, his small eyes twinkling like two stars, and his whole body quivering with the emotion,—such was the laugh of Bams; whilst Rudd, flinging a vigorous arm over his next neighbour's shoulders, sent out a loud ho! ho! ho! that swelled the great veins in his grisly, black-whiskered throat, his stern, yet handsome, features glowing with a deep crimson, the dark circles contracting round a pair of eyes that seemed to take in every corner of the little hut at a glance, his muscular, yet by no means fleshy, frame heaving with this call upon its powers;—it was the laugh of a Titan, and the

walls shook, and the rafters rung, with the sound, whilst the 'other two men, who had been apparently sleeping away their fatigue, got up and stretched themselves, as 'men do who have travelled far and long.

They wore dark, travel-stained clothes, all splashed with mud, and with here and there a rent, where rent should not be. None of them seemed to have been in bed nor slept for a long time; and there was a wildness and ferocity about them that nineteen men out of twenty would have shrunk from. They had not even thrown off their boots when they sat down, but had retained them on their feet, as if prepared for any emergency.

"Supper! supper; ho! Bams!" cried the stouter of the two, sitting down again, alongside of Rudd; "hungry fellows like us can't wait for such a greasy scullion as you are. Come, bustle! bustle! or by old——"

Bam's little eyes twinkled, and an unctuous sigh escaped him, as, with an adroitness that long practice had made perfect, he turned the savoury

contents of his copper into a huge dish, which in a moment stood smoking on the board. Coarse wooden platters, and knives and forks, were then set upon the table, together with several dark, suspicious-looking bottles; and then, every man carving and catering for himself, the four set to with an eagerness that would have made the mouth of a city alderman water to look upon.

Bams was the busiest, the gayest, the noisiest, the most voracious. Rudd and his companions despatched their meal with a sullen voracity resembling more than any thing else that of a famished bear, when just awaking from his six months' winter's sleep. Until hunger was appeased, they had no time for conversation; but Bams!—the sleek, the oily, the merry, the garrulous Bams—was a host in himself. Every mouthful afforded food (if we may say so) for a moral; every tit-bit was washed down with a pungent sauce of quips and jests. There he sat at the head of the table, with his round, bullet-shaped, mottled face, bright as mahogany, and pretty much of its complexion, his large capacious

mouth ever open to receive the contents of his platter, his little eyes twinkling like two stars, his nose—but who can describe Bams? There he sat, crowned king of the feast, a jolly Bacchus in a buff jerkin and greasy small-clothes, happy, noisy, well fed, well lodged,—a very Epicurus amongst the scullions of Christendom.

“Spike! my good Spike!” gurgled Bams, gulping down a moderate dinner at a single mouthful, “you don’t eat, Spike! you don’t drink! Now, Spike, when you know how Jass Bams—your own Bams, Spike,—eat, and drank, and dreamt for weeks beforehand, on the strength of this supper; when he had night-mares and day-mares, and all kinds of wild, uncouth, four-footed fancies of glorious swizzlings, in which Spike, and Bunting, and Jacob Rudd, were to share with him; when the poor fungus was tittivated up, to do honour to the occasion; and rabbits, and hares, and black cocks, dropped down before the very door, quite of their own accord.”

“Curse your gabbling tongue, Bams,” growled Spike; “what sets you to harp on such a string?

D'ye mean to poison us with peaching how you came by all the materials of the feed ? ”

“Hush, Spike,” interposed Bams, with an internal chuckle, “you know your own Bams too well for that. No ! no ! he’s a silly cook that can’t keep secret where his larder’s stocked from, and he’d be a clever fellow, and would need a keen nose, to divine what this fine mess is made of,—eh, Jacob Rudd ? What a glorious smell there is, my boy, in the old fungus ! The very rafters seem as if they were enveloped in an oily mist, a fog that is made up of leverets, and black cocks, and grouse, and——”

“Bah ! you fool,” muttered Jacob Rudd, with a loud laugh ; “bring us a bowl, and then, lads, we’ll brew a jolly bowl of greg ; plenty of lemon and spice, and lots of brandy and hollands. By Jove ! it’s a rough night without, and bitterly cold. Rake the fire together, Bunting, and throw on another log. Ho ! ho ! ho ! we’ll make a night of it. Shut to the door, Bams, and bar it. Spike, you hound,” and Jacob Rudd jostled his neighbour with good-humoured roughness, “why ain’t you jolly ? ”

“Hands off, Jacob Rudd,” growled Spike, whose dark, strongly-marked face flushed over as he spoke, “hands off, I say. Can’t a man hold his tongue, and be silent, if he pleases?”

“Not in my company, master Spike,” retorted Jacob Rudd, with another rough shake; “hang it, man, don’t wear that cut-throat look, as if you were going to swing at cock-crow. Laugh, and sing, and troll a catch, and be merry. We are all friends here, little Bams, Bunt, and myself, and I say it,—hang it,—and I feel it, too, that you are not treating us well to give that ugly phiz of yours, such a sinister leer. And now, master Spike, I’ve told you my mind.”

Spike folded his arms over his brawny chest, and said in a dogged, surly tone, “And what if I should say, Jacob Rudd, I’d not advise thee to meddle with another man, when he’s not meddling with thee? what if I should give you blow for blow, and sneer for sneer? what if I should give you thrust for thrust, and say that I’ll not stand such work, even from you?”

“I’d say that two can play at that game better

than one," retorted Rudd, rubbing his hands with a taunting air.

"Take that, then," roared Spike, springing upon him; "d'ye think a man can sit tamely by and be goaded to madness like an ox? Stand up, Bunt, and see fair play. We'll fight it out before we stir from this spot, that we will. There, take that! and that!" and with all the madness of an infuriate wild beast, Spike sprang upon his antagonist, and with one effort hurled him to the ground.

He was up again in a moment, cool, collected, and as self-possessed as if he had been a statue. The fire had blazed up, and a bright red light was diffused through every chink of the little room. The group stood out in bold relief.—The two principal actors in this sudden tragedy, in the centre, directly in front of the hearth, their tall, brawny, muscular, finely-developed frames thrown into a posture admirably calculated to exhibit the powerful symmetry of their build, their dark, stern faces turned towards the fire, both ready to strike; on the one side, the gaunt, cadaverous

form and visage of the man called Bunting, equally formidable, and equally warlike, whilst Jass Bams, enshrined amongst his household gods, his pots, and pans, and kegs, without one single wrinkle or smile wanting on his oily visage, nor one twinkle the less in his little bead-like eyes,—for little Bams was as bold and resolute as a lion—filled up the empty space upon the canvass, and completed what with his accessories made a very spirited picture indeed.

Bams sprang forward, but Jacob Rudd was too quick for him: he was the assailant now. One hurl of that athletic arm, one grasp of that herculean hand, would have annihilated poor little Bams; but Rudd had a different antagonist to deal with. Spike, to all appearances, was equally as strong, and determined, and puissant as his foe; and with arms locked, quivering chests, limbs that shook in their sturdy strength, as they swayed hither and thither with fearful impetus; with wild, matted hair, flashing eyes, flushed faces, voiceless, breathless, and alive only to the struggle that filled their hearts and

lent vigour to their frames, these two men swayed to and fro around the little hut, filling its narrow limits with a confused mass of legs and arms hurled up into mid air, with gaunt cadaverous Buntings, and sleek, fat little Bamses, stuck in where never Buntings and Bamses had been before. All was noise, uproar, and the wildest tumult.

In another moment both were struggling upon the floor. Now it was Jacob Rudd's infuriate face and titanic limbs that were uppermost, vainly striving to retain their advantage for a moment; and presently the distorted mass reeled over, and Bams beheld Spike appear, equally red, equally breathless, equally hot, equally incapable of maintaining his equilibrium; and then Bams and Bunting would rush in, and Bams's nose would be made the depository of a punch intended for Spike, whereat Bams's nose, being naturally indignant, would turn itself up, and swell out of all size and shape with very rage: and then one of Bunting's eyes would receive temporary notice to quit, and become ignominiously extinguished;

and then round they would roll again, hot, and breathless, and yet still striking right and left, as if their very existence depended upon their doing so ever after.

“They’re murdering of each other, Bunt,” screamed Bams, flinging himself, for the sixth time, into the scuffle; “bear a hand there, and choke Spike off; he’s quite a bull-dog, is Spike; he wants choking, does Spike: strangle him, Bunt! strangle Spike! he’s a bull-dog! choke him! choke him!” and following his own charitable directions, Bams put the knuckle of his fore-finger and thumb into that portion of Jacob Rudd’s throat where the jugular vein is popularly supposed to be placed, and by dint of tremendous exertions, aided in ‘no slight degree by Jacob’s own spent condition, for Bams’ fingers, of themselves, were far too fat and fleshy to have been of much assistance otherwise, he at last, aided and abetted by Bunting, who never for a moment lost sight of his constitutional cadaverous coolness, contrived to separate the death-dealing Jacob Rudd from the equally deadly and

annihilating Spike, and laid them each severally on their backs, like a pair of pugilistic porpoises, to recover their breath, and regain their equanimity, if that were possible.

Then, when they had time to look up—for even after they were separated, much remained to be done, in the way of such pleasant little relaxations as binding up and wiping, and otherwise repairing the casualties of the war pleasantly scattered over their respective countenances and adjacent parts—Bams and the phlegmatic Bunting were made corporeally aware of the company of another actor in the scene, for the door was standing ajar—Bams had not secured it beforehand—and a tall, keen-eyed man, with an expression of face that made Bams tremble, in spite of himself, was standing within a couple of paces from him, eyeing him and Spike, and Jacob Rudd, and the phlegmatic Bunting, and the little hut, and the fire-place, and even the table flung into the corner upon the settle, and the pots and pans, and the huge copper, with an activity of intelligence that made

him start, and wonder who he could be, and what was his name and his business, and how he had come there, and where he was going to, and fifty other things that jostled each other through Bams' brain, in a manner that would have made fearful havoc with the unctuous melange of hare, and grouse, and black cock, etc., had they by any chance found a back-stairs passage to Bams' stomach.

"You've had a fight, I fancy, gentlemen," said the stranger, taking off an overcoat and comforter, and approaching the fire; "well, if you've not finished it, don't mind me: get up again and fight it out, for a half-fought battle's worse ten times over than none. I can wait till you've done."

Bams said they *were* done. He said it with a very crest-fallen air, and his voice was quite husky. It was not with fear, though. They had been fighting, he would confess, at least the two gentlemen on the ground had; and here Bams glanced sheepishly over to Jacob Rudd and Spike, as if he appealed to them to corroborate

his statement, but they had got it all settled, now, and even if they had not, they never would nor could have thought of fighting before such a gentleman as himself.

The stranger laughed, and glanced at all of them again with his keen, eagle eyes. Even Jacob Rudd quailed beneath them, as he picked himself up, and sat down, with a surly attempt at ease, on the settle.

"I have lost my way," said the new comer, after an awkward pause; "these bridle roads through the forest are so perplexing, especially in the dark, even to a man who has travelled them before."

"You have been in this country before, master?" said Rudd, gruffly.

"Yes, years ago," said the stranger, fixing his eye on the man he addressed.

"Many years ago?" said the other, inquiringly.

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"I ask your pardon, master," stammered the man, endeavouring, without effect, to brave the

keen scrutiny of the person he addressed, "I thought you, perhaps, belonged to these parts."

"No. I have lived in every clime beneath the sun, and therefore it would be odd if I had not lighted on such a wild spot as this is, in my wanderings. Neither do you belong to this part of England, my man."

Rudd moved uneasily on his seat. Bams and Bunting noticed his confusion, but even they, so strong was the awe created in them by the stranger's manner and appearance, did not venture to join in this interrogative kind of conversation. As for Spike, he sat in his own dark corner, of which he formed by far the darkest and gloomiest portion.

"You are a Wiltshire man, if my ears don't belie me," said the stranger, with a quiet laugh, that increased Rudd's irritation.

"That he is—is Rudd," stammered Bams, in a half-frightened ecstasy; "oh dear! to hear that."

"I knew it," said the new comer, quietly;

“you have travelled far, my friend, to land here at last.”

“Not so far as yourself,” said Rudd, looking up with dogged composure, and taking in at a glance the grizzled, yet still curling hair and broad brow, the piercing eye, bronzed complexion, and short pointed beard of his tormentor, —he even remembered afterwards the peculiarly patterned handkerchief the man wore round his throat; “the rich fancy us poor folks ha’nt a right to go where we fancy; we’re to be like gorse, and strike root where we are planted; that’s your doctrine, master.”

“Hurra, Jacob!” yelled Bams, in a voice that suddenly became very faint and inaudible, as he caught the stranger’s keen glance fixed on him.

“Not quite, my man,” said the other, significantly; “I have no objection in the world for you, or this friend of mine here,” and Bams trembled, as he became aware that he was being designated, “or any other honest fellow, changing his quarters east or west; only they ought to

carry a good name with them, and more than that, a clear conscience."

"Like Jacob Rudd," suggested Bams, who was beginning to get the better of his strangeness; "like Jacob or Spike, eh Spike, you rascal!"

Spike looked daggers at poor Bams, for this introduction of him in such an unnecessary manner; it wasn't at all the thing, and that Bams should know before he was six hours older; so thought Spike.

"Ah! like Jacob Rudd," muttered the stranger, laughing to himself again; "'t isn't an odd name, that, and yet it sounds so to me."

"Odd, does it," inquired Bams, quite disregarding the muttered oaths and kicks of Jacob Rudd himself, and the frowns and hems of the more phlegmatic Bunt; "now that's singular, for it don't sound so to me, or Spike, or Bunt there; we all know Jacob's name as well as we know Jacob's self; don't we Spike, my boy?"

Spike's only answer was a kick on the shins,

that under cover of darkness, made Bams curl up his feet, and screw up his mouth, and twinkle his eyes harder than ever.

“Jacob Rudd!” muttered the stranger, so inaudible, that even Bams did not catch the sounds.

Rudd got up and walked towards the door; some indefinable feeling made Bams look up towards him; he tottered rather than walked, and all the ruddy colour had forsaken his cheek, his lips were tightly compressed, his brow ghastly white; Bams thought he was ill.

“My horse is in the stable, Rudd,” said the stranger, in a voice, which though they had heard it only for a few minutes, by its singular tones, was by this time deeply impressed on their memories; “I found out you had a stable here, and as the poor beast had carried me a long way, I littered down a bedding for him, and gave him some hay; you can go and see whether he is all right, or not.”

The words were spoken in a tone of command;

Bams wondered at them, and he wondered still more when Jacob Rudd said, as he opened the door, "I'll look to your horse; us poor men were born to be servants, to the 'brute beasts of our betters, master."

The stranger smiled in his own quiet, ironical way, and said he was hungry; any other speech would have vexed Bams in a way—this on the contrary, quite put him into a good-humour,—in a twinkling he had placed a piping hot supper before his singular guest, that a king might have envied; his own jaws watered, as he snuffed up its delicious aroma, and even, when supper being concluded, and the stranger, taking out of its own peculiar receptacle, a long slender pipe, with a curiously carved and painted bowl, began to smoke, and presently became enveloped in an atmosphere so dense, that nothing of the upper part of his person was visible but a dim and uncertain outline,—the three men sate quite still, scarcely daring to stir, lest they should disturb their singular and unwelcome guest.

“Bams,” said the stranger, after a pause of half-an-hour or more.

Bams had fallen into a doze, but at that one expressive syllable, uttered in such a tone, he was alive again in a moment.

“Bams, can you give me a bed here?”

“If you could put up with a shakedown,” suggested Bams, very humbly.

“Put up with it!” said the stranger, laughing, “to be sure I can, and easily too; get me it ready at once, if you please, for I’m very tired,—hallo! where’s that varlet, Rudd?”

“In the stable,” suggested Bams.

“Oh, very well; he’s perhaps better there than here; now get my bed ready; these gentlemen can take the settle; I hope Rudd does not intend to patronise that horrid, reeky stable for the night; I had many a sorry misgiving for housing my horse in such a hole, but travelling makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows; put the shakedown in that corner, out of sight of the fire—I hate to see a fire when I’m in bed,” and with a prolonged yawn, and a protestation of his

drowsiness, Bams' mysterious guest turned into his quarters for the night, which was nothing more than a very soft, and very plentiful couch of new heather, as sweet as a haymow and as soft as down.

CHAPTER V.

Two o'clock, and Bams was not asleep yet ! We cannot say that he had never closed his eyes, for he had shut and opened them, and shut them again and again, without ever once producing that temporary oblivion of all things passing around, so necessary to a state of somnolency. He had rolled himself over from one side to the other, times out of count, now leering wofully at the fire on the hearth, and the huge copper, and the recumbent figures of Spike and Bunting, as they lay stretched on the settle, and then gazing philosophically up to the ceiling, and listening at one time to the wind howling out of doors in the forest, and at another to the crickets chirping about the old hearth-stone.

The occupant of the heather-bed slept soundly,—

Bams could tell that, from the measured breath he drew; and from thinking of him, Bams remembered Jacob Rudd, and presently he began to wonder why he had not come back again, for Rudd always slept in the house, when he came there, as there was not another house for miles; and even if there had been one, Jacob was ~~not~~ the man to leave such comfortable quarters for others, even were they ten times as good, to run this risk of losing himself in the forest, in the dark.

“He must be in the stable,” thought Bams, and the more his mind dwelt on this idea, the more thoroughly did he become impressed with it, and the more did he wonder at it. “Why didn’t he spend his night in-doors, as he had always done before?—What was the stranger to him, or any of them, that Rudd should turn himself out on such a night?”—Bams could not understand it at all; “but he must be in the stable, for all that,” thought Bams, as he turned a drowsy eye to the fire again.

It was very strange! the fire was not half as bright now, and he could not hear the crickets

chirping on the hearth; and as to the wind, it had died away altogether; he could not hear the stranger's low, regular breathing; he certainly was getting much drowsier, and as to Rudd, if he chose to sleep in a stable, in preference to being stowed away snug and warm in the old hut, why his friends had no right to quarrel with his taste; and so Bams sank down on his elbow, and was presently snoring away right merrily, dreaming, for all the world, of glorious stews, made of unheard-of quantities of black-cock, and grouse, and hares, mixed up with terrific battles, in which gigantic Spikes and Jacob Rudds were involved.

How long he slept, he could not tell, but it was not yet morning, when he was aroused by a cold, chill air, blowing in upon him. Bams raised himself up, and saw that the door was open, and what was stranger still, Rudd,—Jacob Rudd; the fire was not dead out yet, and Bams saw enough to enable him to recognise him,—hanging over the stranger's bed! Bams' breath came thick and hurried; he remembered, as if by inspiration, all that had passed between this man and Rudd

overnight; something glittered in the twilight of the room, as Rudd moved his position, which Bams knew must be a knife. Bams could hear the stranger breathing now, quite regular and calm, whilst that man hung over him, meditating one of the foulest deeds that stain our fallen nature. Rudd drew back for a moment, as if surveying his victim, with a view to discover the most vulnerable point. Bams' agony amounted almost to madness; his throat was parched and dried up, his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, his eyes almost started from their sockets;—Rudd crept forward again, with outstretched neck and hand, and at that moment, as if God's angel was looking down into that sordid hut, and lent Bams strength to achieve his task, did Bams send a hoarse yell through the blackened walls, that aroused Spike and Bunting, and the stranger from their sleep, only to be saluted, on opening their eyes, by the figure of Bams, sitting bolt upright in his bed, with hair on end, and dilated eye-balls, quivering in every limb with horror.

“What, my good fellow, ails you?” demanded

the stranger, in an angry tone. "Have you seen a ghost, or had a nightmare, through eating too much for supper?—or mistaken the wind for a robber?"

"Or had dreams?" suggested Bunting, sententially.

"Where is Rudd?" demanded Spike, yawning; "he's not been here since the quarrel last night."

"Ay, where was Rudd, indeed!" thought Bams; "he had made his escape, thank God, and the stranger's throat was sound and safe still; and, after all, it was perhaps the best way to keep all snug."

"I've been dreaming," said Bams, sheepishly.

"You have!" rejoined the stranger; "then I really beg, my good Bams, that for the rest of the night you won't amuse yourself with dreaming, if it has to cost us our rest: you had much better be awake, than do that."

Bams thought so too: and said he would sit up by the fire for the rest of the night, and got up accordingly. In crossing the floor, he stumbled over something, which, on picking up, he found

to be the knife Rudd had dropped. He knew it was Rudd's knife, and he became so confused at the discovery, that the attempt he made to conceal it was so clumsy, that the stranger's keen eye discovered it at once.

"What have you got there, Bams?—a knife?"—

"Yes, sir," stammered Bams.

"Here, give it to me; let me see it?—ah!—rather an ugly customer, Bams," quoth he, surveying it, curiously; "I shouldn't like to fall in with a man that had such a knife about him, if he wanted to pick a quarrel with me,—eh, Bams?"

Bams' legs shook so that he could scarcely stand.—What if the stranger knew that Providence had, within the last few minutes, most miraculously averted such a catastrophe from him!

"Leave the knife with me, Bams: I'll look at it to-morrow;" and the stranger turned over to sleep once more. Spike and Bunting followed his example, whilst Bams, after awhile raking together the embers of the fire, threw on another

fagot, and sate down in front of it, to watch until the day-light came again.

Rudd was thinking of him at that moment, although he was miles away by this time. His first impulse, on being startled from his purpose, was to plunge the knife intended for the stranger into Bams' heart; but the presence of mind he retained, even in that moment, showed him that such a step was but dyeing his soul with another crime:—and then he thought of escaping;—the door was open, and the stranger's horse could be got out of the stable in a moment:—the next second showed him that it was better to make away on foot, as he was thus sure of escaping, without leaving any clue behind him; and in a moment he sprang into the very deepest part of the forest, and was running at the top of his speed, bare-headed, with reeling brain and trembling limbs, the sweat standing in great beads on his forehead, a fire that oceans could not extinguish feeding upon his vitals; and the blackest crime that man can dare brooding like a fiend within his soul.

The rain was sweeping down in torrents upon him, yet he never felt it; the wind swept in wild gusts through the groaning trees, yet he heard it not; the lightning blazed in shattered brightness around him, dazzling his eyes as he gazed, yet still he pressed forward, now stumbling over the bole of a tree that the wood-cutters had hewn down; now falling over a treacherous ditch, and rising up again with his hands grasping the dead leaves with which the ground was strown; the rain drenched him to the skin, the darkness prevented his seeing a yard before him; he often was forced to throw himself on the ground, to regain breath,—rest he did not require,—and then would start up again, whilst the wind howled more fearfully than ever, and the rain fell, and the thunder rattled above him; but all the fury of the tempests was as nothing, compared with the hell that raged in his own breast.

Still he kept on. He had walked for hours, already, and the day was beginning to break, and yet he felt no exhaustion. On! on! on!—

the forest was cleared at last, and he was on the highway; past villages, and village churches, standing like quiet dreams in their churchyards,—those silent cities of the dead,—seeming in their calmness and beauty, like types of the heaven to which they led; past farm-houses, surrounded by their well-filled stack-yards, and hay-ricks; and here a grey, time-honoured hall, shadowed by its venerable elms, and there, a solitary cottage, the curtained panè of which showed that its inmates were not yet beginning their daily round of patient toil. Still he kept on, now driving away a snarling cur with a curse or a stone, now stopping to pull a stake from a hedge to make a stick of, never pausing for a moment, for the town he was bent to was yet miles away, and in another hour the sun would be up and people astir, and he could not travel then, in the plight he was in.

He began to whistle, but presently dropped it, for even the tones of his own voice jarred upon his thoughts; he wrung the wet out of the ends of his neckcloth, and looked down with a

dreamy wonder at his spattered and muddy boots and gaiters, and muttered that the rain had soaked through into his shirt at the shoulders, and then he thought of Bams and his guests, and this quickened his pace to a run again, until he stopped for sheer want of breath, once more.

He was approaching a town, now: houses began to be scattered along the road, some half-buried, a hundred yards or more away, in shrubberies and gardens, some jutting out upon the very path; and then a market-cart or an early coach whirled past, the passengers weary, wet, and jaded, with a night spent on their hard seats, in great coats and cloaks, under dripping umbrellas, too wretched to notice even him; and mechanics hurrying to their work, smoking their short, black pipes; and a canal, with its sluggish, inky waters, and its black towing-line, as dead and lifeless a picture as the world can produce; and Rydd felt weary and sick at heart, until he came to a bridge, over which he leaned, burying his head in his hands, never heeding

the rain drizzling down into his neck, and running through his hair, making it like so many slimy snakes.

He did not stop there to decide upon what to do; he had done that from the very first: and presently he went on again, following the towing-path for a mile or more, through a dreary, flat country, keeping the town, which loomed down upon the landscape, with its blackened manufactories and ghostly chimneys, like a wild phantom of his own imagination, all the while in view, until he came to a narrow by-way, that branched off to the right; presently, signs of life began to appear; crazy, shattered, weather-worn, tumble-down tenements, that looked as if they had lived hard and fast in their younger days, and were doing penance for it in their squalid misery in old age, appeared at first by twos and threes, and soon, whole streets of them, with the garbage of months accumulated around the doors; whole houses had their windows boarded up, as if to hide the light of day from what was passing within; others, less chary on

this point, contented themselves with shutting out half the light, by means of bundles of rags, old hats, and dirty matting; here a chimney had fallen down, and the bricks that had composed it were still lying in the thoroughfare; snarling curs, smoke-dried, half-starved fowls, and squalling children, as miserable and revolting as dirt, and want, and neglect could make them, met him at every step:—Rudd was in a den of thieves!

It was a sanctuary to him. He breathed freer, and looked about him oftener, and held his head higher with the very thought. Early as it was, the whole place was as busy as bees, and as Rudd walked on, still as quick as ever, he met people at every corner,—men with fierce, dogged, evil-looking visages, and uncouth bearing, at every step, to whom he nodded, and who nodded to him again. No one attempted to stop him, though: and after he had threaded his way through this wild resort of turbulent crime and lawlessness, for some time, he turned down a dark alley, and once more found himself at the water-side.

A low-roofed, narrow-windowed house was before him. One end jutted out upon the canal, with a window overlooking the stream, furnished with a shutter, which was now closed,—the very look of the place would have been against it, in any court of justice in the kingdom, so dark, and sinister, and evil-disposed did it all look; the thatch on the roof was blackened by time, the windows were heavily barred, the very door itself, though it stood ajar at this moment, wore a forbidding look, that seemed clearly to order all visitors to go about their business and not meddle with it, or stand by the consequences.

Rudd strode across the little yard, and pushed open the door; a bandy-legged bull-dog, of a dirty-white colour, with a huge, mis-shapen head, and blind of one eye, leaped out upon him from a kennel, but he drove it away with his cudgel, and entered the low, smoky room, as if he carried his own welcome with him.

A woman started up from her position before the fire;—Rudd thought she had been crying.

“Is Grimes in, Nell?” demanded he, throwing himself into a chair.

“No! he’s away:—are you back again?”

“Yes:—why do you ask such a question?—don’t you see me, woman?” snarled her visitor.

The woman seemed to cower down before the brutal ferocity he assumed; there was very little light in the room, nothing in fact but what the dull, red gleam of the fire produced, and this fell on her bent, haggard, gaunt features as she turned towards Rudd and said almost in a whisper, “You told me when we last met, months ago, if you remember, that if you came here again it would be as a hunted wolf; Rudd, Rudd, there’s something about you, this morning, that tell’s me you’ve prophesied truly: you’ve travelled long and far, for your clothes tell me this; you’ve not been a-bed last night, or you wouldn’t look so wild; but, you needn’t try to persuade Grimes to go with you; he shan’t stir an inch to help you; he did so once before, and look what he got for it! there’s been a curse upon us ever since.”

“Don’t preach, Nell,” growled Rudd, fiercely, “if Mick chose to lend a hand now as he did then, what matter does it make?”

“Matter! why that a curse will be on him ever after; there’s a curse upon us now—we shall be doubly-cursed: and I say he shan’t stir hand or foot to help you.”

“Not if you can not only retrieve all that you have lost all through your lives, but get rich as well, Nell, by joining in a scheme with me that we can work together?” demanded Rudd, with the skill of a tempter; “a plot that only needs Grimes to stretch out his little finger to make you both rich for life.”

“Not if it could make us kings and queens, Rudd. Didn’t you promise as much before? and what did we get by it all? We were honest and respectable before that, and now we are scorned even by the very thieves that swarm about the wretched shed we hide our misery in—No! no! we won’t be tempted again.”

Rudd watched the changes of her countenance with eager interest. Want and misery, and the

uncertain and precarious mode of life to which she had been subjected, had woefully impaired a countenance which, in its better days, must have been more than comely; there was a sullen fire in her dark eyes, a stern yet not repulsive frown in her wasted lips, that lent a rugged beauty to that pale suffering face, that happier fortunes would have seen clad with smiles; he gloated over the vindictive hatred that he knew was smouldering beneath, with the keen, unhallowed joy of a destroyer who feels that his wretched victim is too deeply entangled in the meshes he has woven, ever to extricate himself: he would, like a skilful angler, allow the poor fool to drive away with the bait, whilst he himself held the line and let the barbed hook do its errand.

“You are not poor, Nell!” he said, with a cough.

“Poor!” echoed the woman, scornfully, with a shuddering glance round the wretched room; “no, we are not poor!”

“But still you are not so overburdened with money, that you’d refuse more, eh?”

The woman laughed scornfully at such a proposition.

“ You don’t care about comforts, at least about what most folks call comforts; or, I’d say that I could put you into a way that would add to what you already have.”

The woman had sate down again. With her chin resting on her hand, she was eyeing him wishfully now. Rudd drew closer to her and commenced a hurried explanation in a whisper; at first she repulsed him, whenever he stopped for breath, at one time vehemently, and even angrily; then with a sudden sadness, she began to sob, and the tears stood in her eyes, yet, still Rudd went on: he seemed himself to believe so earnestly what he said, that it half convinced her; she could only find room to doubt now that her scruples and fears were melting away; her remorse and terror were disappearing like frost work before the sun.

“ We are so poor, we have scarcely bread to eat,” said she, in a hollow voice, as her eye scanned the miserable room.

"You will be rich, you will roll in gold," urged Rudd.

"We live in constant dread."

"Ay, now! but when you get rich, a single hour will do it, you will be transformed."

She listened to him with a vacant stare; her mind was already running out in the dreams that he had conjured up.

"But if we are found out, if they get a clue to the business before we can escape?" said she, looking up.

"Fool!" muttered Rudd, stamping his foot, "how can they? you will be hundreds of miles from the place—they cannot trace you—they cannot even say that you had art or part in the business—all will be managed so that no one but ourselves will be the wiser for it."

Her keen, eager, hunger-stricken face, was fixed upon him; her piercing eyes seemed to read him through and through, at every word, in a way that made Rudd shudder.

"You can be rich, girl! roll in gold with the bravest of them, dress finely, live highly, ride

along in carriages where afore you trode wearily afoot; think of that, Nell. It almost makes one mad to think of the misery and starvation you're steeped to the lips in, now, with what you may be soon," muttered Rudd, dashing his black hair off from his flushed face and damp brow; "d'ye hear, lass? you're a pauper now, are almost driven to beg your bread from door——"

The woman uttered a wailing cry; the last words had sent a pang to her heart that all the rest had failed to achieve.

"We are starving, Rudd," groaned she, wildly.

"Well! well, girl, there's a good time coming yet! the wheel 'ill turn now, depend upon it; only help me to persuade Mick when he comes in, to join with me in the business that brought me here, and your fortune and his is made."

The woman shuddered in spite of all her efforts, and Rudd noticed it.

"Girl," he demanded, fiercely, "what have you to fear?"

"I don't know; my conscience tells me——"

"Conscience! bah, all lies, Nell; who cares

about conscience in these times, when poor folks come into the world to rot and fester and starve from their cradle to their grave, and the only kindness they meet with, is that their mothers give them at the breast? You have nothing to lose that I can see."

"No! no! we have not; what have the poor to lose?" said she, bitterly.

"Ay, that's the way to say it! Nothing, Nell," cried Rudd in a transport, "nothing indeed; but here comes Mick at the right time," he added as the door opened, admitting a ruffianly looking fellow, with a sack half filled on his shouklder; "what cheer, my hearty?"

"What cheer, Rudd! its an ill wind that blows you here, I fancy," rejoined the man he addressed, and Mick, disburdening himself of his load, sat down alongside of his visitor. "Nell, some breakfast, in a moment, lass."

Whilst the woman, with a listless silence, arranged the rickety table with the sorry materials for the meal, Rudd and Grimes (for such was the man's name) sat together in moody

silence, which neither seemed disposed to be the first to break. Although both belonged to the same grade of life, there was a marked difference in the appearance of the two men, quite distinct from any variety of form or feature whatever—the distinction, we would notice, had nothing to do with these: it was rather the type of the peculiar idiosyncrasy of the men than anything else, that was so striking at the first view.

The robust, manly, and determined frame of Rudd, the vigorous intellect that displayed itself in his swarthy yet handsome features, his keen, intelligent glance, the wild, reckless earnestness that lent a rugged grandeur to his powerful and athletic frame, we have already described; his fate had been cast amongst the humble, all enduring ranks of the sons of toil: but nature, whilst it had bestowed upon him the limbs, and the sinews, and the strength to win his daily bread with the sweat of his brow, had also implanted inclinations, and desires, and passions in his breast, that made him scorn all honest

labour as the most unbearable infliction, and driven him to seek a subsistence in wider and more congenial channels; the mark of honest labour had never imprinted itself on his brawny hands; he was ripe to any deed, no matter how great the danger and peril might be, provided the reward was commensurate therewith.

The very thought of danger lent a zest to the undertaking; his temper grew sluggish when his limbs and neck were safe; the blood coursed madly through his veins, and his very heart beat quicker when perils thickened around him. Had fate made him a patriot or a warrior, fame would have held him up to the gaze of an admiring world, as an Alexander, a Cæsar, or a Napoleon: as it was, he was simply a hungry, lawless, Ishmaelite, with his hand turned against every man.

The man called Grimes was evidently different; he had toiled wearily and long, for want, and care, and privation had dug heavy furrows in his gaunt cheeks and brow; he had tried everything and prospered with nothing, for as

Nell said, there was a curse upon them now! they had been honest, till necessity had starved them into theft. Born in a kennel, reared in squalid misery, with a youth of lawless vice, who can wonder that all these had produced a middle age of hardened crime? The hour of temptation came; Grimes looked down to his sturdy arms and brawny chest, and felt the demon hunger tugging at his vitals, and thought of Nell at home trying in vain to stifle her own cravings and hush their poor, starving month-old brat into a quiet sleep; human nature triumphed over his sense of right and wrong, and Grimes became a thief; a few more such lessons, and he grew callous and became an outcast from the world.

"You have an errand, Rudd," said Grimes, looking up at last; "you never come to see me but when you have."

"Yes, yes, I have; but eat your breakfast first—or hold! if you can do as much, Nell, I'll eat with Mick, as I've not broken fast since over-night——"

“Not eaten, comrade, since yesterday?”

“It’s the truth; but a hungry belly can’t find time to talk much; as soon as we’ve satisfied our hunger, I’ll tell you all,—one thing at a time, neighbour;” and so saying, Jacob Rudd began to despatch the coarse and sordid meal Nell had placed before them, with a voracity that proved him already to have forgotten the substantial glories of jovial Jass Bams’ supper. The woman excused herself, by saying she had already eaten, and sitting down in one corner, remained a silent yet observant spectator of all that passed.

When they had despatched their breakfast, the two men drew their chairs to the fire, and began talking in a low eager tone, glancing occasionally over their shoulders as if to guard against the chance of eaves-dropping on the part of the woman. The noise of her child crying in the cradle drew her away up-stairs, and then Rudd, pushing his chair back against the wall, began to talk more loudly, and still more eagerly watching the slow and sullen changes his persuasions

wrought upon the heavy, brutal features of his companion.

"There is no danger, I tell you, idiot!" were the first words that were audible through his close-set teeth, "the man is alone and unarmed."

"How do you know that, Jacob?" inquired the other, in a voice, the slow drawling tones of which formed a striking contrast to the more impetuous eloquence of his comrade. "If he shoves himself into such strange kens as you say he does, and carries so much money about with him, he's a precious fool if he doesn't carry something or other."

"Fool!" growled Rudd, with all the savage ferocity of a tiger in his determined visage, "do I not know him well? Have I not dogged him from one end of the kingdom to the other, and further? Do I not know his habits as well as if I had been valet or trencher-cleaner to him? Was not his father my ——" and at that moment a sound in the room above made him pause for a moment, and look round him with a half-startled look, as if he was afraid he had allowed something to

escape him in his passion which he would have repented uttering.

“Tush! I’m a fool to waste my breath in trying to per̄suade such a hempen coward as you, Grimes, to aid me; but I pitied Nell and the brat, and Spike had vexed me over-night, and I thought I would punish him by letting you go shares in the spoil; but I’ve done, and so now good-bye;” and he started to his feet.

“Sit down again, Jacob, and give me a minute or two to come up to all you’ve said,” rejoined Grimes, in his deep drawling tones. “Sit down again,” and he pushed Rudd down again upon the chair he had just risen from.

“What use is there in my giving you time, Grimes?” retorted Rudd, tauntingly. “You are such a poltroon, you’d be afraid to go hand in hand with a man in such a thing. But there’s Nell coming down.”

“No, no! she’s only walking about with the child to quiet it,” said Grimes, pausing as the slow, heavy tread of his wife was heard in the room above. “You are sure the man carries money about with him, I suppose?”

Rudd uttered an oath, and half rose from his chair.

"Don't be angry, Jacob," said Grimes, turning his brutish visage upon his companion. "For what's the use of risking oneself, unless there's a good chance of a reward? I wouldn't have cared at all, but only Nell takes on so whenever I go out now at nights."

"Well, well, decide at once, or let me be gone," cried Rudd, impatiently. "If you go, you may safely reckon on getting a well-filled pocket, and at little risk. If you stay at home, I can get fifty better men at a cheaper rate."

"No, no, Jacob; you won't do that," said Grimes, in a wheedling tone. "You wouldn't leave me in the lurch."

"Damme if I wouldn't. I want to be revenged upon this Dalton, or whatever is the name he goes by, for many a bitter wrong he has been the means of doing me; and I'm hard up too, Grimes, and that always goads me on."

"Ay, ay, it always does everybody!" laughed the other sullenly.

“And then we cannot find a better time for our attack than the present,” continued Rudd, eagerly, as he leaned forward and lowered his voice; “he has nobody with him, and is in a lonely part of the country, and Bams or Spike will take care he doesn’t escape them if he did me. Now will you join?”

“When has it to be?”

“To-night or to-morrow,” said Rudd, in a whisper, as the woman was heard descending the stairs, “will you—”

“With all my heart,” said Grimes, throwing himself back in his chair, and affecting to be asleep. ‘Rudd got up and stretched himself.

“Has Grimes been up all night?” he asked, in a low tone, as she stole up to the fire.

“No, why do you ask?” she demanded, with her quick furtive look.

Rudd nodded, and glanced significantly over to his accomplice, “Oh, nothing, only he is so drowsy, I thought he might have been—that’s all.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE sun had been up an hour or more, and little Jass Bams, as merry as a cricket, was bustling in a high state of excitement about his little hut, preparing a breakfast, which he very modestly expected would astonish his singular guest not a little.

The stranger loved eating—so did Bams: he enjoyed it with all the true zest of a real *bon vivant*; the stranger would be hungry. “A hearty supper always does make people hungry,” thought Bams, flourishing his gridiron, “and so we’ll be prepared for him; it’s not at all comfortable to wait for meals when you’re hungry;” and as Bams himself was hungry, and the stranger himself was out walking about the old alleys and quarries that surrounded Bams’ residence, and

might drop in at any moment, as hungry as a roaring lion, (which is indubitably the hungriest animal in existence,) Jass bestirred himself vigorously to have everything ready in a twinkling on his return.

And thereupon arose in the smoky old fungus, the glorious odours of grilled bones, and the sweetest of home-fed spareribs, with the delicious aroma of a spatch cock, which Jass had warily hoarded up over-night for this especial occasion; there was frizzling of meats and bubbling of gravies, the very sounds of which made little Jass quite obstreperous and perfectly beside himself, for bare delight; then there was a great show of covering up everything individually in mysterious white dishes and brown jars and gouty pipkins, and the cloth being properly laid, and the breakfast things set out, Jass sat down by the side of the fire within view of everything, to allow his own thoughts to simmer gratefully; Jass was quite happy now—quite big with the dreadfully important task he had to discharge, but singularly-quiet after all,—Jass was quite himself.

Presently Jass heard the stranger's firm, decisive step outside, and jumping up, affected to be very busy with his work, and wonderfully he did it too, till his guest did come in.

"All ready to dish up, sir," cried little Jass, in a brave tone, "just awaiting you, sir," and in a jiffy every corner of the table, was crowded—it certainly was not a very big one, but there was plenty of room for all that.

"You were born with a genius for cooking, Bams," said the stranger, with his peculiar smile, "I've fallen upon my feet here at any rate."

"Our family have it by nature, master," said Bams, chuckling: "we've quite a gift for using the basting ladle, if I may venture to name such a thing to you, sir—but eat the spatch cock whilst its smoking, and then try the bones, sir; the lads were away by day-break or I'd have had some new-laid eggs for you, and as for the bread——"

"No apologies, Master Bams,—you treat me like a prince—Ah, the lads were away early, were they?"

"Yes, they're gone to their work, sir."

“Humph, all three, Bams?”

“N—no, master,” stammered Bams, with momentary confusion, “there were only two stayed here all night.”

“But there is no house near at hand, is there?”

“No, not for miles.”

“Then the third must have slept in the shed with my horse, eh, Bams?”

“May be so, sir,” stammered Jass, who began to fancy himself in a mess.

“Ah! and where is he, my good Bams?”

Bams stammered out that he did not know. Rudd was such an unaccountable fellow, when the mood took him, that no one could pretend to describe his movements; he said——

“He’s an unaccountable, is he?” said the stranger, smiling; “that is to those who don’t understand him; but you understand him, Bams.—you’re his crony, eh?”

Bams wouldn’t presume to say as much as that; Rudd and he were friendly, perhaps, but nothing more.

“Humph, have you known him long?”

"Eight or ten years, maybe; ever since he came into these parts," said Jass, trembling, he scarce knew why.

"Eight or ten years," muttered his interrogator, musing, "that is pretty much about the time;" and he then asked aloud, "And how did you first come to meet?"

"I was coming home from market one Saturday night, neither quite sober nor yet quite drunk, master,—rather merry, and when about I'd made half my journey, I was overtaken by a great, huge fellow, who asked if I'd any objections to company the rest of the way? Liquor always makes me talkative, and I was mortal glad to fall in with any one to talk to, for its only stupid work talking to one's self, sir; and so I said I hadn't, and we trudged on together, and after a bit we got on famously and were friends in no time. Lor! how we laughed, and sang songs, and cut jokes, to be sure; the rascal was the most jovial blade I'd seen for an age; I quite cottoned to him as if he was my own brother, and I was

right sorry when we got to the end of the lane where we had to part."

"Wer'n't you afraid of being waylaid and robbed by this facetious footpad, my good Bams?" demanded his auditor, with a stern smile.

"Robbed! oh what an idea!" chuckled little Jass, "I'd just three halfpence in coppers, and a crooked sixpence for luck like in my pockets, and so there was very little temptation as one may say; but however, we came to the top of the lane, and I said we must part there, and then the vagabond said he'd taken a fancy to the country like, and wouldn't care to spend a month or so here-a-way, if there was a nice, tidy, cosy inn near at hand. It was quiet and out of the way, he said, and he rather preferred it for that."

"The false rascal!" muttered his auditor.

"Well, and then I said there was a nice little inn, a road-sider, if he kept on for half a mile or more, where he might live for ages, and no one

ever come near but the woodcutters, and the quarrymen, and a Salisbury or Reading carrier once a week or so; good entertainment for man and beast, and moderate charges into the bargain, and then he wrung my hand, and said he'd pitch his tent there for the present, and so we parted, and I went home."

"And how long did he stay there, Bams?"

"Half a year, as near as may be. He was a jovial blade, sir, and had lots of money, and made it fly like paving stones; he was very shy for a week or two after he first came, but this was easily accounted for, as he told every body he'd had a bad accident and was just getting about again; he was coming home late one night, not over steady, maybe, and had tumbled into a gravel pit, and sure enough when I first saw him in daylight, there was a terrible gash right across his forehead."

"Like this, Master Bams," said the stranger, taking a little red miniature case from his pocket, and displaying it to Bams' gaze.

"Like that! oh yes!" echoed Bams, starting

back, as his eyes fell on a face, the very counterpart of that which he remembered Rudd's to have been at the outset of their acquaintance; "there's the very gash over the brow, only a little fresher-like—Rudd's was blue then, and the queer frown, and the hare-lip—Rudd has a hare-lip, and it sadly spoils his looks, which beat all I ever saw afore."

"Well, and Rudd lived jovially for some time, eh?" said his guest, eyeing him with the keenest interest, "plenty of money, eh?"

"Pocketsfull," muttered Bams, who had fallen into a kind of stupor ever since the other had closed the miniature and returned it to his pocket. "What an unnatural likeness, oh my!"

"A natural one, you mean, Bams; but to proceed with your story, has Rudd's money lasted ever since?"

"That's a hard question to answer, sir," rejoined Bams with a short cough; "he kept the game up bravely for a time and then he got crusty, and cranky tempered, and would neither treat nor be treated, and shunned his

former comrades, all but Spike and me—Spike and me were always prime cronies with him, and so after some months had flown over, one day he disappeared, no one knew where, and we heard nothing of him for months again.”

“He did!” muttered his auditor.

“He did indeed, sir—and then when we’d quite given him up for good, all lo and behold, one night, when we went into the tap again as usual, there was Rudd, in his old nook, singing, and drinking, and carousing as jovially as ever. If he was a king before among us, he was an emperor now, with his swashing purse and his dashing air—fatter, and bigger, and handsomer than ever,—and here he’s been from that day to this, barring occasional absences, which we’ve all got used to now in a manner.”

“You make quite a hero of Master Rudd, Bams,” said his guest, at the conclusion. “And what, pray, may be the gentleman’s occupation?”

“Anything or nothing, master,—making love to a pretty lass, going with the squire a-shooting, worming a favourite pup, or ——”

“That will do—I must go now—get my horse saddled, and then come in and let me know, Bams,” rejoined the stranger, with the air of one whose slightest word was law to those he addressed. “I fed him myself before I came in to breakfast, and am sure that he’ll carry me bravely through all,”—and then as his strange host withdrew to obey his bidding, he flung himself with an odd feeling of sated curiosity upon the settle, and was soon immersed in the strange, half wild, half mournful reveries with which he had from youth been accustomed.

In a few moments Bams came in to say that all was ready, and his guest accompanying him to the door was immediately welcomed by a loud eager neigh, which proceeded from a strong horse of the Flanders breed, black as jet from nose to hock, with the exception of a small patch of pure white on the forehead, from which his owner called him “Fairstar.”

Fairstar was in truth a noble animal. He had come into the possession of his present owner, who had purchased him when in Flanders several

years before, when a mere colt ; he was of the purest blood, as wild and unmanageable as a fiend to every one but his groom and his possessor, in whose hands he was as docile as a lamb ; a capacious width of chest, strong, finely shaped limbs, a fiery eye, swelling nostrils, ears flung back upon his head, shaggy fetlocks and mane, a short pastern, and a strength that was never exhausted, were his chief excellences. He had accompanied his master in all his wanderings through the world, now carrying him safely over the wild pampas of South America, now beneath the pyramids of the Nile and across the ice-bound wastes of old Norway—the companion of his adventures, the sharer in his dangers, the participator in his toils ; and to the noble animal was the man, before whom prime ministers had trembled and haughty Kaisers turned pale, indebted on two memorable occasions for his life.

The horse was worthy of his rider, and when after placing a piece of gold in Bams' hand that repaid him ten times over for his night's entertainment, the stranger himself leaped into the

saddle, the noble beast sprang madly forward with a bound that cleared the broad brook by which they stood, and then seemed to fly over rather than to touch the 'velvety turf of the by-way they had to traverse, with a magical swiftness that made Bams rub his eyes, and mutter and wonder at his singular guest for days and weeks afterwards.

What a magical charm there is in being mounted on a high mettled horse, who understands almost by intuition every wish of his rider, on a deliciously cool, bracing day! The clear, fresh air so exhilarating in its effect upon the spirits, the agreeable influences derivable from the thousand associations of the scenes that fly swiftly past you, the hazy blucness of the atmosphere, the bare yet not ungraceful nakedness of some great oak or elm dotting the wintry landscape, the sounds of the woodcutter's hatchet made musical by distance, the very silence itself according so well with the feelings at such a time, all go to swell the amount of enjoyments—and when youth, and a hope that has never been

cheated, are added to the list, what are all the triumphs and gaities of the life of cities in comparison!

Such were the feelings of the stranger, as with a feeling of exultation for which few could have divined a cause, he turned his back upon the secluded vale in which he had spent the night, and giving his generous steed the rein, rode on for many a mile, absorbed in his own reflections.

By noon he was at Coventry—he determined to dine here and proceed again in the afternoon, and with this intention he ordered dinner at the Crown, and a private room as well. He had scarcely sat down to the former before a carriage drove up to the door, and presently a great hubbub was heard on the stairs,—

“This way, madam—this way, if you please—room quite ready, fire lighted,” said the host, bending his supple body in painful genuflexion,—
“will have luncheon ready in a few minutes; or perhaps you would prefer dinner at once—John, bring the bill of fare for the inspection of the ladies—did you say dinner, ma’am?”

“ Yes sir,” said the elder lady ; “ dinner, if you please—send the chambermaid to us, and get us dinner as soon as possible : don’t trouble me with the bill of fare—we are quite indifferent, only do let us have a good fire.”

“ Certainly, ma’am—John, send the chambermaid to the ladies at once,” said the landlord, bowing himself out ; “ dinner will be on the table in half an hour.”

The walls were very thin, and the occupant of the next room, in the pauses of his own repast, could hear a good deal of what was said ; but when the waiter came bustling in with the second course, and the door of the next room opened at the same moment, the whole stream of the old lady’s eloquence burst upon him at once—

“ Miss Clarendon, love, I scarcely think I would recommend you to change your dress—none will know us here, and we will be quite in *dishabille*.”

“ Certainly, Lady Susan,” said a very sweet voice ; “ it will save time.”

“ Miss Clarendon ! ” muttered the stranger,

laying down his knife and fork; and then turning to the waiter he inquired who were the occupants of the next room.

“The postilion says it is Lady Susan Clarendon and her niece,” said the man—“a Shropshire family, I believe, sir.”

“Oh—travelling up to London?”

“No, sir; going north, to her ladyship’s place in Scotland, I believe.”

“Very well, that will do; you can retire now—I’ll ring when you can bring the walnuts,” said the stranger, sighing; and then, when the man had retired and he was left alone, he arose and paced the room for an hour or more, with his arms folded over his chest, his head sunk down, and his face gloomy and disturbed by painful thoughts.

Sometimes his mouth writhed with the convulsive motion of a man undergoing some acute internal pain; at times he groaned, and pressed his hand upon his forehead, as if to drive away some dreadful image; and then, with a great effort, that made his muscular frame shiver with

the struggle, he would conquer his emotions and smile sternly, as the walk was resumed with a firm step, and a head flung proudly back, as if in scorn.

The old lady—the Lady Susan Clarendon, and her protégè, all this while were very differently occupied. The day was extremely cold and raw for the time of year, and therefore the blazing fire that filled the old-fashioned grate was doubly welcome to the two cold, half-benumbed travellers; they were seated before it; Lady Susan, fussy, kind, bitter, sarcastic, and merry by turns, evidently to amuse her companion, whose fair brow still wore a shade of sorrow.

“Eleanor, my love, you must not look quite so *triste*; I can assure you it scarcely becomes such charming features—you are positively like the sun behind a cloud,” said she, laying a withered arm on her companion’s ivory neck.

“You try to cheat sorrow of its due, Lady Susan,” said Miss Clarendon, with a gentle smile: “I almost fear, though, that I am a very sad travelling companion. It is wearisome enough to be jolted and shook to death, but when you

add to this a companion who can never open her lips but to utter a groan or a complaint, as I have been doing for the last two or three hours—”

“I will put an embargo on your tongue for the rest of the day, if you go on with such self-reproachful observations,” cried her ladyship, following up her words by putting her skinny hand on Eleanor’s ruby lips; “you are only too good, and gentle, and forbearing. But goodness, love! ring the bell this moment, or those creatures will never remember that we have not yet appeased our hunger. People at inns always are twice the time in getting what you want. I hate an inn: everything is so wretched and so bad. The innkeeper is so extortionate, and keeps up an enormous retinue of people just for the mere sake of draining everybody’s pocket that comes into his house,—chambermaid, and waiter, and postboy! Why the very innkeeperess herself, would take a fee if it were not for mere shame of the thing. Ring the bell again, love.”

The waiter came,—this time, fortunately, with dinner,—and her ladyship’s tirade against inns

and innkeepers was put an end to. It was lucky the dinner was pronounced incomparable, or the haughty old lady might have visited her displeasure on the poor waiter at her departure; and then, with her good humour completely restored they drew their chairs towards the fire again, and sat talking until the carriage was again announced.

“Four o’clock, I declare, love!” cried Lady Susan, striking her repeater; “how time flies! Stay here, love, till I return. I must get Sutton to alter my pelisse,” and Eleanor, sinking back in the comfortable arm-chair she occupied, sat gazing abstractedly into the fire, tracing out, perhaps, in the fantastic shapes it exhibited, the course of her own future existence.

Presently the door opened very gently—so noiselessly that it did not even disturb her reverie—and a tall figure, enveloped in a dark travelling cloak, crept in. It was growing dark, but the bright blaze of the fire lighted up at one and the same moment the eager, half-joyous, half-sad, and very beautiful features of the young girl, and the

pale, sternly solemn, careworn, and yet determined visage of the intruder. She leaned further back, quite unconscious of observation, and threw from her face the lovely shower of curls, with one hand, so far that he could even trace the blue veins wandering across her fair azure brow and Hebe-like neck. A smile of enchanting sweetness stole over her features as she indulged herself in a retrospection of the past. Even the stranger felt comforted and strengthened, as he gazed on such a picture of girlish beauty, and then, with an air of stern resolve heightening the paleness of his lofty brow, he crept silently back, and descending the stairs, ordered his horse to be brought, and in five minutes was flying away from the fair town of Coventry as swiftly as one of the noblest animals in England could bear him.

CHAPTER VII.

AT the end of a week,—for Lady Susan, like an old-fashioned votary of the ancient régime, progressed by easy stages—the travellers crossed the borders and arrived in Scotland. The novelty of travelling, the delightful bustle of moving from place to place, seeing always something new to astonish and delight her mind, or awaken her still unsated curiosity, had heretofore prevented Eleanor from feeling the tedium of such an arrangement. The country might be flat, and the towns they passed through uninteresting, but the delightful elasticity of youthful spirits buoyed her up through all. Now, however, all was changed.

They had for miles been traversing a dreary stretch of moorland, whose boundless expanse of

dullest grey was not even broken by the solitary hut of some moorland shepherd or cotter, when a scene of unexampled beauty burst upon the young girl's sight, which in a moment dispelled the weariness that was fast creeping upon her and fixed her spell-bound in breathless astonishment to her seat, scarcely heeding the speech Lady Susan had prepared to welcome her to her new home. An abrupt turn the carriage made round the brow of a hill, and below them stood, backed to the north by well grown woods of larch and oak, a mansion built in the Elizabethan style, with wide-spreading terraces and gardens, a smooth shaven lawn, which even in winter would look green and trim, sloping down to a little bay, beyond which was the open sea, with a sloop standing out with her head against the wind. The sea looked so fair and beautiful under the spring sunset; the bay, with its white strip of beach and its romantic rocks, heightened so charmingly the beauty of the scene; the very house itself looked so like the creation of a fairy's wand, that Eleanor, who had expected something

very different, from her own impression of Lady Susan, could scarcely restrain a cry of delight, as she turned to her ladyship to express her surprise.

“You are welcome, my sweet child,—welcome to Leven!” cried Lady Susan, squeezing her hand. “Ah! here comes Mr. Mac Graw, my steward, with all his tail. How d’ye do, Mac Graw? I’m back again, you see, to keep you all straight. This is Miss Clarendon, Mac Graw,” and her ladyship, forgetting in a moment the sentimental strain she had been cultivating, insisted on getting out of the carriage and walking up to the castle, attended by the obsequious, vulgar, and cunning Mr. Mac Graw, whose impudent ugliness and uncouth dialect had already procured for him Eleanor’s aversion and disgust.

“Sit still, love, and let them drive you to the door,” cried Lady Susan, thrusting Eleanor down again upon the seat; “Mac Graw and I have a great deal to talk about as we go up that you can’t understand, and I want you to tell me your first impression of my den, by the time

I get there; so that you really must ride, and keep the walk through the grounds till the morning. They are very small,—quite a gem in a miniature setting—but every thing, I flatter myself, is perfectly matchless about the place. But you must ride now. Drive on!” and with a wave of her hand, that was intended to be decisive, Lady Susan walked on towards the castle, with the aid of a gold-headed cane and the fat arm of the squab, ugly, fiery-headed Saunders Mac Graw.

As the carriage whirled rapidly along the smooth, gravelly sweep in its bright green setting of laurel and holly parterre, Eleanor’s mind was itself in as perfect a state of bewilderment as the mind of a young, ardent, unsophisticated girl, with a total inexperience of the ways of the world, can possibly be.

Could Lady Susan really be acting a part, as Cecil’s suspicions would seem to hint? and was all this kindness and amiability but part of a deeply laid plan between her and the immaculate Jasper Vernon? Or was Cecil himself

doing her a grievous wrong in charging her with a sordid avarice, a crooked ambition, and the hope of bartering the honour and the happiness of one 'so young and so pure for her own unholy ends, when her ladyship's sole crime was, that she was old, and odd, and eccentric, and rather wilful, into the bargain?

The carriage drew up at the entrance, putting to flight in an instant all Eleanor's suppositions; and Eleanor being assisted out, found herself standing alone with a respectable middle aged woman, who was evidently the housekeeper, whilst three or four tall footmen, in liveries of blue and silver, stood with a respectful air at a little distance.

A low curtsey, and "If Miss Clarendon would be kind enough to follow her," said Lady Susan's deputy, and in an instant Eleanor was conducted across a well lighted hall, and up an ample staircase, hung with family portraits, and along a gallery, filled with pictures, at the end of which was a suite of rooms which in future, the woman said, were to be appropriated to her use.

“They were the late Mr. Clarendon’s, ma’am,” said the housekeeper, drawing back the curtains, to afford Eleanor a better view; “there’s a beautiful view from the windows, but my lady never could abear them after he died, and so they’ve been all shut up ever since, and never used till now.”

Eleanor gazed around her with silent curiosity, as if she half expected to glean some notion of the deceased spouse of her eccentric hostess from the dwelling he had inhabited. But nothing could have disappointed her more in this respect. The furniture was rich, and dark, and massive; heavy couches and chairs, dark velvet curtains, solemn pictures, long narrow windows that seemed to admit the light by calculation, rather than by liberality, were their chief characteristics. There was, however, a boudoir with a wide old-fashioned bay window, fitted up with more cheerful elegance, where amber satin curtains supplied the place of crimson velvet, that looked down upon the beautiful bay that Eleanor had already determined to visit very often; and the

young girl turned away from her survey with a very contented heart.

Lady Susan met her in the hall when she descended. She was still attended by the obsequious Mr. Mac Graw, who had evidently been receiving a lecture on rural economy.

“Well, child, how d’ye like my den, eh? Shall we be able to exist so far north, or not?” cried her ladyship, chucking her under the chin.

“I’m quite bewildered, dear Lady Susan. The grounds are really beautiful, and the castle far surpasses my expectations. Your collection of pictures——”

“Bah! all trash, love,—pictures of old, grim, grizzled freebooters and border harriers as ugly as old Nick. Don’t blush, child. One half of them, I warrant me, were hanged, or deserved such a fate.”

“Mr. Humphrey Macdonald,—your ladyship’s great great grand uncle—that red-faced gentleman in the cauliflower wig, miss,” said Mr. Mac Graw, directing Eleanor’s attention with his stick to the portrait of a red-headed ruffian, the very

counterpart of himself, "had the honour of being beheaded by order of George the First, for robbing his Majesty's mails on Bardon Moor."

"Silence, Mac Graw!" cried her ladyship, in a voice of thunder; "what does Miss Clarendon care about Humphrey Macdonald? Get away to the kitchen, and see if those long-legged rascals are ready to bring dinner up. We are both dying of hunger, and quite hungry enough to eat Humphrey Macdonald himself, if nothing better were to be had." And then, as Mac Graw and her ladyship's woman moved away, Lady Susan, leaning on Eleanor's arm, walked towards the dining-room, and said,—

"And you really like Leven, Eleanor, seriously and earnestly?"

"Seriously and earnestly, I do, Lady Susan. The situation is beautiful and romantic, in the extreme. That bay below is really delightful, and the view I shall have of it from the boudoir window——"

"I hope, Eleanor, we shall be very happy here," said Lady Susan, with kind emphasis.

“Can this woman be acting a part?” thought Eleanor, reverting to her former suspicions, as she gazed on the stern, commanding figure, dignified even in its decay, seated before her; but when her eye fell on the fantastic costume of Lady Susan,—her high-heeled shoes, with silver buckles, and stockings adorned with huge crimson clocks, her outrageous cloak, and hat tied down upon her gaunt face,—she could scarcely restrain a smile, and in a moment her distrust vanished into air.

“We’ll live quite like two enchanted princesses,” said the young girl, laughing gaily; “we won’t admit a single swain to our castle,—that is, unless your ladyship is quite ready to give them a most unexceptionable character for all knightly and gallant qualities,—and as for ladies fair, they will be quite excluded.”

“Wait till you see all our jackals, Eleanor,” said Lady Susan, smiling, “before you commit yourself by forbidding them to growl in our den. I can assure you we have some very well-behaved animals here in merry Scotland.”

“Oh, that I do not in the least doubt,” rejoined Eleanor; “only for the present, madam, we will be quite invisible.” And a single glance down upon the dark dress she wore chased all the smiles from her animated countenance.

“Well, my love, your wish shall be my law in this,” said Lady Susan, gently; “and now let us have dinner.”

CHAPTER VIII.

CECIL CLARENDON'S career began very ominously for his future fortunes. When riding leisurely onwards towards London, (for it was to the metropolis, as the field where the great battle of life is most keenly fought, daily and hourly, that all his dreams pointed,) a carriage, filled with fashionably dressed women, came whirling past so rapidly, that his horse took fright, and poor Cecil, sadly chagrined at such a discomfiture, was thrown, and lay for several minutes insensible on the spot where he had fallen.

When he came to himself again, he found that he was not alone. The carriage, and its bevy of tulips, had disappeared, and in its place, a solitary horseman was bending over him, with no slight concern visible on his pale, stern features.

"Are you hurt, my lad, or only stunned with

the fall?" inquired he, in a low, singularly musical voice.

"Only stunned, I hope," said Cecil, raising himself proudly on one arm, and scarcely relishing the familiarity of the epithet; the next moment, however, he uttered a cry of pain, as a sharp thrill of agony ran through his frame, and he sank back powerless into the stranger's arms.

"I saw you fall," said the other, continuing to talk, as if Cecil heard him, although he read in the ashy hue that overspread his features, in the drooping of the eyelids, and the convulsive twitching of the mouth, that Cecil had swooned,— "right on one side, and you stretched that arm out, as if to save yourself:—you arn't very heavy, my lad;" and he raised him in his arms. "I admire your pluck, though, in saying you arn't hurt, and if we can only get you put on Fairstar's back, and carried to any house——"

"Father! Father!" sobbed Cecil, drowsily, as he felt himself moved, though he was so weak and helpless with pain, that he did not even open his eyes.

“My poor lad!” muttered the gentleman, pressing him to his breast, as he felt Cecil’s cold cheek leaning against his own; and then moving gently on with his unconscious burden, he reached his own horse, which stood with wonderful docility until he approached. “And now, Fairstar, my boy, move on:” and slipping the bridle of the young lad’s horse under his arm, the little cavalcade slowly put itself in motion, the stranger supporting Cecil in his sturdy arms, on the horse’s back, as tenderly as a nurse fondles the weak, puling, unshaped mass of humanity, just launched into the troubled stream of the world’s bitter struggles.

They were a long time before they came to any house, for they could not travel very quickly, and the wild, romantic road they were traversing, was but thinly populated; but at last, when even the stranger’s active benevolence was beginning to feel exhausted, a road-side inn, with a smooth-shaven bowling-green stretching down from an ivied gable-end to the river’s edge, came into view.

The stranger uttered a growl of delight, at which Cecil opened his eyes.

“Another minute, my dear boy,” said the former, cheerfully; “patience! patience for one minute more, and then we shall be all right. Holloa, there!—are you all asleep at noon-day, or not, in these parts?—holloa! ostler! ostler!”

A shaggy biped rushed out of a stable towards them, stretching himself, and yawning, as if just aroused out of a winter's sleep; a shaggy dog followed them, growling and barking his welcome; and then a rosy-faced landlady appeared at the little door, curtsying down to the ground, with a chubby, good-humoured face, looking the very personification of wonder and astonishment.

“We shall want a bed, ma'am,” said the stranger, looking up to the little diamonded windows, with their snowy curtains behind, and over the head of the hostess, into the clean, sanded kitchen, looking so bright and cozy, and then right into the face of the landlady herself, whereat she blushed redder than ever.

“Certainly, sir.—Margery, run into the little

blue room, and turn down the coverlid, and put some fire into the grate," cried the good-hearted creature, who became all tenderness and pity, the moment she divined what had happened. "Belike the poor gentleman's met with a bad accident, sir?"

"Nothing to speak of, I hope, my good woman," said the stranger, cheerfully; "thank you, I can carry him quite well," on perceiving that she would have assisted him to lift Cecil from horseback; "and if you will just go on and lead the way——"

"Certainly, sir!—mind that beam, if you please!" pointing to a rafter that abutted on the narrow little staircase; "now turn, sir, to the left;—we've but little room, but everything's nice and clean, as I'm an honest woman, and if the poor young gentleman——"

"Send your man away, on horseback, for the nearest doctor," said the stranger, laying Cecil down on the bed; and as Mrs. Tipperley retired, wondering, and murmuring, and curtsying down to the ground, he turned to the bed, and whispered, rather than spoke,—“My dear lad, how do you

feel, now ?—is there much pain in your arm? it burns, perhaps? ”

Oh! those sweet words of pitying kindness,—like the softest, balmiest summer rain, on some pining flower, they sank down into Cecil's heart, that had braced itself up against wrong and injustice, and there came bubbling up in their stead a fountain of grateful hopes and gentle thanks, that flushed his pallid cheek, and made his dark eyes glisten, as he murmured, “ Better, I feel much better !—but who are you, sir ? ”

The stranger had been busily engaged in propping him up with the fresh, snowy pillows, so as to ease the pain as much as possible. He paused, however, when the low, mournful tones of Cecil's voice reached his ear, and a stern frown overspread his calm features for a moment. Presently, however, it cleared away, not, however, before Cecil, who had been eyeing him wistfully, exclaimed, “ Pardon me, I thought I remembered seeing you, but where or when I cannot call to mind ; it must, however, have been only fancy, after all.”

“ I never saw you before,” said the stranger,

after a pause, during which, his keen, eagle eye had scanned every feature of Cecil's face with the most eager scrutiny; "no! I never saw you before."

"I would rather," said the young man, as a flush overspread his fine, ingenuous countenance, "think that the kindness I have received at your hands to-day arose entirely from the dictates of your own heart, than from any more interested motive. Who, or what I am, can matter you but little; and, for the present, at least, I have reasons cogent enough to keep that a secret."

"I understand you, my boy," said the other, smiling significantly; "and to confess the truth, I am pretty much in the same position as yourself—an affair which I have much at heart, and which, in fact, nearly concerns the happiness of some human beings very dear to me, has led me to adopt the same incognito,—my name is Linden."

"Your present name—your alias, I presume, sir," said Cecil, smiling.

The stranger nodded and smiled too.

"Very well; mine is Middleton," said Cecil.

“Should the accidental acquaintance, my misfortune has introduced us to, ripen into companionship,——”

Linden pressed his hand, “I like you already, my boy.”

“By Jove, I am glad to hear it, Mr. Linden,” said Cecil, returning the pressure; “the inexperience of a lad so young to the world as myself, should deter me from forming a hasty connexion, but yet our fancies cannot always be restrained, and I feel as if I had known you for years; perhaps after all, this accident of mine may turn out a lucky circumstance.”

Hope is very contagious; there is a fascinating charm in a fine face lighted up with ardent anticipation, in the beaming eyes and the smiling lips, that the most stoical amongst us find it very difficult to be proof against. Linden, to judge by his own countenance, was quite won over by Cecil's manner, and their mutual confidences were only broken in upon by the entrance of the doctor, who after carefully examining Cecil's arm, declared it to be broken. There was a compound fracture

of the limb, he said, which must be instantly reduced; and pulling out his instruments and ordering Mrs. Tipperley up into the chamber to prepare some lint, in one moment the whole house was in a commotion to get every thing that was wanted; the kitchen maid had to get a copper of boiling water ready, whilst the buxom landlady bustled about hither and thither in that dreadfully quiet way, which of itself is quite enough to throw a nervous person into fits, and Linden himself kept his patient watch beside Cecil, ready to buoy him up with patience if his firmness was likely to give way.

“There will not be much pain, my dear boy,” said he, parting tenderly the short, dark curls that clustered round Cecil’s pale brow, “it will soon be over.”

“I am not afraid,” said Cecil, smiling with Spartan courage, as Doctor Phobbs unrolled his tourniquet, “and I think my courage is proof against the little pain I shall endure.”

“I think the young gentleman had better be turned more to the light,” said Doctor Phobbs, who had a very large nose, which by dint of

long practice gave a nasal twang to everything he said.

“Mrs. Tipperley, ma’am, be kind enough to draw the window curtain as far back as it will come; now, Margery, where is the hot water, and the lint for the bandages? I think you’re quite in luck, sir, to have fallen in with such a woman as our hostess, on such a painful occasion—quite a treasure of a woman, sir.”

“Oh, Doctor Phobbs!” exclaimed the buxom hostess, colouring up to the eye-brows.

“Be kind enough to proceed with your office, sir,” said Linden, sternly.

“Certainly, sir, certainly,” exclaimed Doctor Phobbs, with professional deference.

“Now, sir, you must have a leetle patience, the pain will be but slight, and if Mr.—, I beg your pardon, sir, but you did not favour me with your name,——”

“Linden, sir,” rejoined that gentleman.

“If Mr. Linden will lend me his valuable assistance,” quoth Doctor Phobbs, talking in a low, cold-blooded tone, “it will be all over in five

minutes' time, only as my partner, Mr Merryweather, says,—”

“Oh, go to Bath with Mr. Merryweather,” growled Linden, who began to get quite sick of Doctor Phobbs's prolixity; “if you will be kind enough to mind the business before you, sir,—”

“Not the slightest offence, sir—I really beg your pardon, and will now proceed with the operation,”—and Doctor Phobbs, folding back his coat-sleeves, and planting Linden in such a posture that he could not stir without disturbing Cecil, at last condescended to commence: not however before by dint of raising his eyebrows and shoving back his wig, and elongating his lantern visage, and coughing dubiously every few seconds, and quoting a great deal of various dead languages, he had duly impressed Mrs. Tipperley with the most devout reverence of his erudition and learning, and thrown the servant girl, who had all her sex's horror of bleeding and doctoring in a very great degree, into incipient convulsions.

Cecil felt that his new friend was eagerly watching his countenance during the whole of the

operation. The pain, contrary to Dr. Phobbs's prognostications, amounted to absolute agony; but with the exception of the total absence of colour in his face, and a convulsive twitching of the jaws, he made no sign. He felt very weak after it was all over, and was quite grateful for the dry toast and the weak tea the cheerful, rosy-faced landlady prepared for him. The pain he had endured, and the low feverish state it had induced, had however almost deprived him of the power of eating, and he soon sank back upon his pillows in the hope of sleeping.

To sleep however was impossible; the constant, burning, pricking pain of his arm prevented that, and he could only lie awake and think gratefully,—for his very weakness made him gentle and docile, poor fellow!—of all that had happened during the last few days, and the long interval of idleness that was probably to intervene before he could again be up and stirring. And then as he closed his eyes once more, he felt that his strange companion was hanging over him, and eyeing his pale, pale face with wistful eagerness

—and then came dreams and conjectures of this new friend, and eager hopes for the future for both; but as the night stole on, and the fever grew upon him, the figures that flitted before him all disappeared, and Herbert and Eleanor assumed their place, forming part of some wild and troubled dream, from which he strove in vain to escape. And still, whenever in his moments of consciousness he opened his eyes and withdrew the white curtain, the dark, silent figure of his companion, rendered ghost-like and gigantic by the feeble rush-light, was visible—leaning back with unclosed eyes, watching him as he lay.

Those 'solitary vigils! were they to cement a friendship that was to endure for the lifetime of both?—the one on the bed of sickness and pain, with its youth of proud and lofty aspirations, its futurity of mighty deeds, its hereafter of wealth and fame, the very splendour and glory of which cast into shade the suffering and seclusion of the holy present—the other, in its sleepless watchings, with its knowledge of the great world without, its contempt for the hollow falsehoods, the bitter

cheats, the pitiful chicanery, the sinfulness and crime and guilt that stamp immortal souls with the brand of devils, hoarding up in its own calm, stern heart the experience of many years, the dreams and realities of a lifetime, the solemn teachings of a spirit that in the humility of its greatness has learned how to live!

The past and the future lay before them—the one dreamed of the past with a solemn yet lofty awe, that with all its many and bitter lessons, yet lacked that which is the bitterest of all. Linden, with all his painful retrospects, had no ghost of departed crimes and misdeeds to upbraid him with their silent tongues for guilt committed or duties left undone; his errors had been those of a lofty and a noble spirit—of a spirit whose highest, and purest, and holiest aspirations had been chilled, and ruined, and trodden down by the cold, precise, pharisaical axioms of a world with whose sober tenets he had no sympathy. The proud man had turned upon the foot that spurned him, and with a heart still writhing under the indignity and callousness of the pun-

ishment inflicted upon him, had enshrined himself in his own stern self-rectitude and honour, and become an isolated, lonely, lofty being, feeling the great tide of human life swelling round him, and yet like some mighty headland that for centuries has withstood the onslaughts of the howling flood beneath, lifting himself up in solitary grandeur far above the petty ambitions and heart-burnings of that very world he had taught himself to despise.

The future lay like a golden dream before the other. There was something prophetic in the very smile, the reflection of the hopeful heart within, that cheered the lofty Linden whenever he gazed with silent love on that pale yet bright and happy face that seemed to wear its very happiness in defiance of blisters and Doctor Phobbs: and Linden himself, as he gazed, learned to feel that there was something yet to love and to cherish in the world—it was a lesson that youth taught to age, the ignorant to the wise!

And thus knowledge and pain kept their silent vigils!

CHAPTER IX.

“To-morrow,” said Cecil, a week after this, looking up and smiling on Linden, as he grasped his riding-whip, and extended his really well-knit chest, with a yawn, “to-morrow, Linden, we will take the road again.”

Linden smiled, too; it was a singular trait in the intercourse of these two oddly assorted friends, that the younger had already so far outstepped the usual diffidence of boyhood as to address the cold and haughty Linden in the familiar style he now commonly used; but nothing could withstand the charming and seductive air of simplicity with which this singular being invested his most trifling actions. The very simplest words he uttered, were they

but monosyllables in brevity, seemed to carry with them a meaning whole sentences of ordinary conversation fail to suggest; and yet when Cecil attempted to analyse the sensation he experienced after any of these conversations, he never could satisfy himself as to the cause of this charm: so much was voice, and physiognomy, and the calm, quiet, decisive air of knowledge and gentleness, mingled with the whole.

“And where, pray, Cecil, shall we go?” demanded Linden, quietly.

“Go! anywhere to be sure,” cried Cecil, rapping the heel of his boot with his whip, “anywhere, so that we only do get away from this dull hole.” Cecil was still pale from his accident, and not over strong even yet, with all Mrs. Tipperley’s and Linden’s nursing.

“Will you go to London?”

“If you choose,” rejoined Cecil, with less animation than he had previously used; “certainly, if you have business in London—”

“Me! oh, no, my dear Cecil, I have no business of any kind to transact. I am quite untrammelled;

and we have no tie upon us, so that we can roam wherever we please."

"We won't go to London, then," said Cecil, decisively; "I don't like London, sir."

"There you are wrong. London is peerless at certain seasons; but we won't discuss that now. What say you to Paris?"

"Ah, I should like to see Paris. I have been twice in London, for a fortnight each time; but Paris—the seat of every thing gay and amusing, and seductive—"

Linden smiled. Twice in London, for a fortnight, and yet Cecil talked as if he had ransacked the mighty metropolis of the world, and exhausted all its countless sights. "And what do you expect to see in Paris, Cecil?" he demanded, abruptly.

"What a question! every thing, in a word. The gayest and most brilliant court in Europe—"

"Graced by a monarch as unprincipled as his great ancestor, Louis XI., and as selfish as Mazarin himself," rejoined Linden, bitterly.

"The most splendid palaces," continued the

youth, eagerly ; “the noblest public buildings ; the most learned men in science and art ; authors whose names and works are as household words even with us ; poets whose lyrics deserve to be written in letters of gold ; painters whose compositions are only second to the Raphaels, and Rubenses, and Vandykes of former days ; patriots whose apostrophes to liberty—”

“My dear Cecil,” said Linden, laughing heartily, “pray say no more until you return, lest you should be tempted to unsay all you have just uttered. The great men of France, like many others, in too many instances only employ the credit of their fame for their own emolument, by taking places under the government. Their poets are but false priests at the altar of liberty, and offer up the sacrifice of Cain at her shrine. The novelists pander only to the vilest and worst passions of human nature. Her patriots sell their merchandise for silver. But enough of all this : to-morrow we will commence our journey, and seek for adventures wherever they are likely to met with.”

Cecil felt not a little piqued at this rough annihilation of all his heated oratory ; but he had the good sense to keep it to himself. Nothing, however, could exceed the delight he experienced on knowing that within a few days, at the farthest, they would be in Paris ; and he went to bed, and slept with a light heart, and slept very sound indeed, notwithstanding his arm.

How long he slept he did not know, for he was abruptly aroused from a happy dream by a startled scream, closely followed by a pistol shot, evidently discharged in the house ; and hurriedly leaping out of bed, and flinging his dressing-gown around him, he made the best of his way to the door. All was dark on the little landing ; but there was a confused sound of many voices near at hand, and, guided by these, the young man groped his way down stairs, and the next moment beheld a scene which, brave as he was by nature, made him involuntarily retreat a step, as he came upon it.

Linden, with his stern features rendered terrific by the absolute absence of all colour, stood with

flashing eyes, and a form that seemed to swell and dilate with every breath, with one pistol pointed at the head of a sinister-looking fellow whom he grasped 'tightly' with the remaining hand. The window of the little room was open, and a second pistol lay, with a crowbar and a handspike, at his feet. He looked up when Cecil approached, and said in his usual quiet, imperturbable way,—

“My dear Cecil, I'm afraid I've disturbed your dreams. Go back to bed again, and forget that you saw me in such a melodramatic attitude as this, by the morning.”

“A likely idea! and you're in danger of being robbed, or, perhaps, of having your throat cut,” rejoined Cecil, wondering more at the astonishing self-command Linden displayed at such a moment than at the singular situation in which he found him. “But what is the matter? for whatever it is, you take it very coolly.”

“Certainly. This gentleman, whom I shall introduce to-morrow morning to a magistrate, and a friend who has unluckily escaped, took it into

their heads to pay me a midnight visit; and as I have a decided objection to such unseasonable calls, I have detained this rascal to answer for his conduct elsewhere. There now; you have the riddle expounded to you."

Linden said all this with the easiest air in the world. Had he been in his own box at the opera, delivering a critique on Grisi or Lablache, he could not have been less impassioned. His voice was cold, and even measured in its tones, and his proud, beautifully chiselled lip curled as if in disdain of the explanation he was making to a boy.

"What shall we do? Does any one live near here? Where is the landlady, perhaps she can tell," cried Cecil, all in a breath. "Where did the robbers break in? were there only two?"

"No more—this cut-throat and another huge rascal—they were standing at my bedside when I awoke."

Cecil rubbed his eyes—could he be in a dream, —Linden seemed to be reading out of a book, and yet the man was there, and the pistols, and Mrs. Tipperley was screaming murder behind the

door, and groaning, and shrieking, and yelling, as if the robbers had discharged the contents of fifty pistols into her; and then, fairly giving way to the terrors of her situation, fainted clean away, and was forgotten in the confusion; until she thought it necessary to come to life again, and straightway became quite cool and collected, and even volunteered to keep guard over the prisoner, armed with one of Linden's pistols and a warming-pan, provided he was properly bound, hand and foot, and quite incapable of doing the slightest mischief to any one.

"We'll sit up till daylight, now, Cecil," said Linden, after the housebreaker was properly secured, and given over to the care of the shock-headed groom and a jolly, red-faced, broad-shouldered miller, whom he had summoned from the mill on the other side of the ford; "Mrs. Tipperley can make us some broiled ham and coffee, perhaps, and after that we can go to sleep in an arm chair, if possible."

"That I will, and welcome, sir," said Mrs. Tipperley, who was quite herself again, now, and

not at all nervous or staggered by having a real live burglar in her house; "Bess will have the fire as bright as diamonds in a crack, and if you would like a few poached eggs——"

"No, no; that's too much, Mrs. Tipperley," said Linden, laughing; "the ham and coffee will do famously."

"Only to think," said the poor woman, as she descended the narrow stairs, two steps at a time, "that if it hadn't been for that comely gentlĕman being here, I might have been murdered clean away by two such ruffians, and all o' that dear, sweet young man a-breaking his precious arm a week or two ago. Well! well! there's a Providence above us, after all!" and with this pious ejaculation the grateful creature turned into her bright, cheery kitchen, which, despite the assurance of the cuckoo-clock over the dresser that it was only two o'clock, and the drowsy looking figure of her red-headed servant, with an undeniably sleepy nightcap on her head, already displayed most portentous preparations for a pretty extensive *dal*.

“Here’s a pretty mischief, John Sibbett, to befall a poor, lone woman like me,” cried she, striking her arms akimbo, as her eye encountered the portly form of her neighbour, the miller, stretched on the settle; “pretty times, indeed, when honest folks cannot sleep easy in their beds for fear of getting their throats cut, and their pockets picked, into the bargain, for them.”

John Sibbett smiled,—he was a good-tempered man, was John, as all stout men should be, and the gossips (but this is all scandal) said that John was rather sweet at times on the thriving, bustling widow,—and said they were precious times indeed, “he really did not know what to make of them; they were far too pretty for him.”

“Make of them indeed!” cried Mrs. Tipperley, who enjoyed in a very great degree the common failing of starting off at a tangent with something that had been said before; “what can we make of them, when all the great folks, kings and commons, are ’bolishing executions and such like? We’ll all be clean killed outright by’n by, John, that’s my opinion.”

John scratched his head, and began to smoke his pipe. "Times really were getting fearful: he didn't know what to make on them."

"And then to say," cried Mrs. Tipperley, warming with her theme, "that 'bolishing hanging and transporting 'ill make all the thieves and murderers take quietly to work, to earn an honest livelihood! No, no, John, take my word for it, there'll never be any good done in England as long as there isn't executions, and gibbeting, and such like."

"Yes, missus, quite right there," assented the shock-headed hostler, giving the prisoner a kick with one foot; "'cutions are main fine things, and make one feel quite bold and savage like, after one sees one."

"Hold your tongue, Rafe!" cried Mrs. Tipperley, in a putting-down tone, "what should a natural like you know of such things? You're a fool, Rafe, as I've told you scores of times afore."

Rafe scratched his shaggy head, and scowled down upon his manacled victim; he felt that he was a natural, and as such had no right to speak

about such things. And yet the poor, half-witted fool had more than half hit the truth, after all.

“ Lor! I wish you’d only ‘a-seen the gentleman upstairs, John,” said Mrs. Tipperley, fanning herself with her apron, as she stood in front of the blazing fire, cutting the ham into thin, crisp, dainty slices; “ he didn’t look fierce, and blaze up as you’d a-done, John, nor swear like a trooper, and rave like a play-actor. He was as cool and quiet as a young girl at her confirmation; and yet there was a terrible fire in his eyes that almost dazzled one, and his face was awfully white.”

“ Humph! frightened, praps,” growled John, who did not half admire the widow’s admiration of her guest; “ these fine quality folks, Phoebe, are often arrant cowards at bottom.”

“ He’s not, John,” retorted Mrs. Tipperley, warmly; “ he’s as brave as a lion, John. But, lor a massy! what’s that?”

John laughed outright, now; “ What did she hear?” he asked, in a half taunting tone.

“ Really, John, it’s not half kind of you,” said Mrs. Tipperley, pettishly, as she drew back from the window at which she had been standing: “ getting frightened out of one’s sleep so, and having such company as that cut-throat in one’s house at such hours, is like to make one feel nervous like; and it’s not kind of you, John, to laugh at one so, and I don’t feel obliged to you for it, at all.”

She looked so cheery, and loveable, and plump, and cosy, as she said this, and her neat, tight rigged figure was so temptingly seductive, that John couldn’t refrain from flinging his arms round her waist, although it was a thing he had never done before.

“ I know you don’t mean it, Phoebe. A kind heart like yours never could teach such ripe, cherry lips to pout and look sulky, even if it tried; and even when you scold ever so, and look a very termagant, there’s always a bright blink in that wicked black eye that lets me into the secret, and tells one it’s all sham.”

“ For shame, John Sibbett!” cried Mrs. Tip-

perley ; “ you really grow quite audacious ; you get really worse and worse.”

“ Missus,” said Rafe, in something between a grunt and a whine, for he had been properly snubbed at the commencement of the night, and wasn’t likely to get too bold now ; “ missus, did you hear anything anow ? ”

“ Where, Rafe ? John Sibbett, be done. Speak, you natural,” to Rafe, who seemed to be dozing over again.

“ A minute or two ago, missus,” rejoined Rafe, rousing up again ; “ just aneath the porch, missus.”

John Sibbett glanced over to the prisoner, whose keen eye glittered on the hostler, though his small, mean frame still kept its lounging posture ; he didn’t leave go of Mrs. Tipperley, though, for she was trembling like a willow in his arms.

“ There’s somebody a creeping round to the window, missus,” said Rafe, who had wonderfully quick hearing ; “ hist ! there’s two—three—”

The prisoner sprang up, chained as he was :

Rafe was upon him in a moment, and grappling him in his wiry arms, flung him on the floor again.

“ We’ll all be murdered ! Oh lor ! I’m sure we will ! ” groaned Mrs. Tipperley, turning very white.

“ Cheer up, Phœbe,” said John Sibbett, venturing to steal a kiss, in the agitation of the moment ! “ if they’re only two, or three, or four, or half-a-dozen, we’ll be a match for them.”

“ Oh, John ! I’m a poor, lone woman,” groaned Mrs. Tipperley, wringing her hands.

“ And whose fault is that, honey ? isn’t it your own ? ” quoth honest John, boldly ; “ isn’t it quite a-tempting of Providence, with so much bonny looks and winning ways, living all alone and unprotected, like, at any one’s mercy ? Isn’t it ? ”

“ Missus, they’re trying the milkus window,” burst in Rafe, fixing his great goggle-eyes on the pair.

“ Oh, Rafe ! Rafe ! ” cried the servant-girl, digging a pair of red, knobby, frosty-looking

hands into the bony neck of poor Rafe, whilst her short, squat, dumpy figure came with a heavy thump into his open arms; "oh, lor a massy, Rafe!"

"Was there ever such a born idiot?" growled Rafe, laying his sentient burden, petticoats, clogs, and all, upon the settle; "who'd a touch such a—?"

He did not finish the sentence; for at that moment a heavy blow, deadened rather by the intervening door, burst upon the massy barrier: another and another succeeded, which made it quiver, and rend, and split, as if the sturdy oak of which it was made had been as frail and yielding as an ashē plank.

"Watch the prisoner, Rafe," shouted John Sibbett, springing ferociously towards the door, with his gun ready cocked; "give a call up stairs, Bess, lass, to the gentlefolks—Phœbe, honey, be quiet and don't be afeard,—and now, my hearties, I'm ready for you."

There was something inspiring in the very actions with which he accompanied his manly words; John had good, round, honest, English

shoulders, a sturdy chest, ruddy cheeks, with some short, brown, crisp locks of hair parted over his forehead, and a strong, sinewy, well-knit frame, that looked quite capable of carrying out the determination that flashed from his eyes: and now as Mrs. Tipperley saw him throw off his coat, and tuck up his shirt sleeves, baring his arms to the elbow, as if there was work to do, she neither fainted, nor screamed out; nay, she didn't even give herself time to feel frightened, but sate with her apron raised to her mouth, very white, certainly, but no more; and even when Linden and Cecil came down, she found tongue enough to explain what had happened, and even began to scold the short, frowsy, dumpy, pug-nosed servant girl for her hysterics, although at the very moment the door shook and quivered upon its hinges more fearfully than ever.

“Stand up, John—give the first rascal that enters, the contents of your shoulder-piece, and leave the second to me,” cried Linden, with more eagerness than Cecil had ever seen him display during the whole of their intercourse; “Now

then!" and as he spoke, the door was shattered to splinters, and one,—two—a perfect legion of wild, fierce, murderous-looking villains flew in upon them.

"Fire, John, fire!" cried Linden, in a calm, resolute voice; and John fired, and retreated a step, as the man he had singled out, staggered, and fell.

"Stand aside, it is my turn now," muttered Linden, raising his pistol, with what to Cecil appeared most diabolical coolness, at a man who by his stature seemed to challenge his antagonist's attention; and Linden, steadying his weapon, fired; the fatal bullet, true to its mark, hit the man, who swerved rather from the position he had for a moment assumed, in the shoulder, and who with a cry of rage and pain sprang boldly forward, and grappling Linden in his arms, the strangely assorted pair for a moment seemed to stand almost motionless in the centre of the floor; and then with a volley of oaths and imprecations the burglar suddenly relaxed his grasp, strove wildly for a brief space to preserve his equilibrium, and

then with a spasmodic convulsion of the jaws, fell on the floor, insensible.

“You are hurt, Linden,” said Cecil, approaching him, after a time, during which, Linden, as if held by some strange enchantment, had hung over the prostrate form of the man with whom he had been contesting; “there is blood trickling from your neckerchief,—the villain cannot surely have stabbed you in the throat.”

“Oh, it is nothing, my boy! a mere flesh wound,” rejoined his protector; “Sibbett, send down to the mill for assistance, and have these two rascals properly secured, together with our friend of the bed-room, until the morning; their associates, I see, have taken the opportunity to decamp.”

As if to give the lie to his last speculation the glass of the small lattice window, immediately behind him, was shattered to pieces, and a couple of bullets fell into the room. Cecil, who had in vain looked for any symptom of terror in Linden’s demeanour heretofore, fancied at this moment that the jaws quivered, as he laughed, and said,—
“If our friends don’t take better aim in future,

they might as well save their powder and shot for a better purpose."

A dead silence fell on the little party after this speech. Even John Sibbett, sturdy, and brave, and fearless, as he was, looked grave, and wished in his heart, that they were all well out of the business.

"It is useless thinking of going to bed again, now," said Linden, after a dreary pause; "If Mrs. Tipperley will make a good rousing fire, we can very well finish the night on the settles,—I don't think we need apprehend another attack, and in that case, all may as well get as much sleep as possible before morning."

Linden, as he spoke, curled himself up into his corner, and arranging his plaid over his head and shoulders set the example of repose. One by one the little party, inspired with confidence by his exhortation, dropped asleep; even Cecil, who had felt more wakeful and suspicious than any of them, began to feel the drowsy god laying his leaden influence upon his faculties, and in a short time, everything within the house was as hushed, and still, and silent as the grave.

CHAPTER X.

WHATEVER other faults Lady Susan Clarendon was chargeable with, no one could deny that her high birth, and even more than ~~this~~, her high breeding, when she chose, by expelling the eccentricities that at times obscured it, to exhibit it, were more than sufficient to make Eleanor's all-dreaded sojourn at Leven much less formidable, than she could ever before have anticipated.

"I'm going quite to forget that I'm an old woman, Eleanor," said she, as they were seated at breakfast one morning: "and although it would not be becoming, to grow dissipated all at once, there is not, the slightest occasion, love, to mew ourselves up like a couple of enchanted ogresses in this old castle."

Eleanor sighed, and her beautiful eyes filled with tears: Lady Susan laughed at the half imploring look her companion cast upon her, as she continued, "We must really do a little bit of popularity down here, my love, if only for the sake of keeping up our dignity with our neighbours,—now, don't pout that ruby lip, child,—I must introduce you to the county; you're a Clarendon, Eleanor, and as such you must make your debüt in a new neighbourhood with Clarendon eclat,—reach my *portfeuille*, love, and then leave me for an hour or two,—I have a great many letters to write."

"Ought we not to live as privately as possible, for the present, dear Lady Susan?" said Eleanor, as she reached the old-fashioned, massively ornamented writing-case to the eccentric old woman; "our recent bereavement, the fatigue you must have suffered from your journey,——"

"Nonsense, love,—I am never fatigued," burst in Lady Susan, fearful of being diverted from her purpose: "I really am very strong indeed, for seventy-two, and never felt a jolt all the way

down, thanks to Robert's driving,—there now, love, vanish like Ariel, and if you can pick me up a Ferdinand to play to your Miranda, by your return, I shall be all the better pleased."

Eleanor would have lingered longer, but Lady Susan had already begun to write, and with a foreboding sigh she left the room, and arraying herself in a close straw bonnet, a thick shawl and stout shoes, set out upon her walk, determined to explore the romantic beauties of the walks surrounding Lady Susan's residence; the few scattered glimpses she had already obtained in a long drive with her ladyship, the previous week, having only raised her curiosity still further.

Leven was, in sooth, fairyland itself for a young girl with a high-souled and romantic imagination. The Castle, for such it in reality was, with its light and graceful cupolas, and colonnades, and terraces, built of stone, bleached almost white with age, seemed like some lonely star set in the dark larchwoods beyond; whilst beneath it, or rather before it, its odd fantastic gardens laid out in the Italian style, made one half expect to descry

some of Boccacio's stately dames and gallant cavaliers threading its bewildering mazes. There were high hills in the distance, which, to Eleanor, who had lived all her life in a flat country, looked like mountains, and beyond all and yet within sight, lay the open sea; there were no end of adventures ready to start up in Eleanor's mind, when she pursued her solitary walk, whenever she paused for a moment to gaze her fill at all these by turns; but they were soon put to flight, when she beheld, on her return, the formidable pile of letters Lady Susan gave to the footman for the post.

"There now, Eleanor, I have done with business for to-day, and now tell me what adventures you have had."

"None, Lady Susan, from Dan to Beersheba all is barren," said Eleanor, smiling, "I saw a woodcutter down in a coppice, and started a hare from her form, and heard a horse galloping over the carriage road, but unfortunately I could not see, from the walk I was in, whether the rider was a gentleman or a ploughboy."

Lady Susan's hard lips relaxed into a smile.

“Ah, Eleanor, what a pity you had not the curiosity to give chase to the cavalier; you would have had a perfect adventure, had you done so, and such an unexceptionable hero, too!”

“I’m really quite curious,” said Eleanor laughing; “have I missed a real adventure, Lady Susan?”

“You have indeed, child; I can tell you such a young man as Norman Macdonald is not often met with.”

“What a euphonious name! but I dare say, nay, I am more than certain,” and the young girl’s beautiful face grew as brilliant as a carnation, as she spoke, “that your ladyship’s hero does not come within an immeasurable distance of Cecil, of my brother.”

“Pish, child,” retorted Lady Susan, struggling to conceal the anger the very name of Cecil Clarendon created in her mind; ‘Cecil is all very well, but Norman Macdonald is immeasurably his superior; you have not seen Norman yet.’”

“Nor wish to see him, if he should make me think Cecil inferior to him,” said Eleanor, with

an odd feeling of pique against Lady Susan ;
“no one can surpass Cecil,” added she, smiling,
“and so, Lady Susan, you can keep your hero,
and I will keep mine,—Cecil against Norman
Macdonald.”

“Ah, ah, you have not seen Norman yet,
Eleanor ; he will be our member some of these
days ; he has good principles, and is a tory ; he
hates the whigs, child, and is rich and of an old
family, and very, very, handsome.”

“The last qualification is quite enough to
redeem all the rest,” said the young girl, proudly,
“even to excuse his being rich, but still I defy
Mr Norman Macdonald ——”

“Well, well, child, wait and see,” said Lady
Susan, as she marched with the dignity of old
Queen Bess out of the room.

Eleanor strove for the rest of the day to put
Lady Susan and Norman Macdonald out of her
head, but could not ; whenever she thought of
Cecil it was always Norman Macdonald whose
name trembled on her tongue, and then she
remembered Lady Susan with her bright eyes

gleaming with spite, the sternness with which she debated upon his qualifications, his wealth, and position, and prospects; until, at last, she grew quite to hate this Mr. Norman Macdonald, and to wish him hundreds of leagues off, and anywhere in fact but in his own country, with his handsome person, and his old priory, and his matchless pack of harriers, and his preserves, and parks, and unencumbered estate; he hadn't even a dowagered mother, or half-a-dozen portionless sisters to detract from his merits, nothing but a younger brother, and he was, heaven knows where, said Lady Susan, when Eleanor asked her once, with an extraordinary fit of confidence.

Lady Susan, as if she was sensible that she had slightly outwitted herself, did not during the rest of the day allude to Mr. Norman Macdonald, and when they met again at dinner, nothing could exceed the playful tenderness of her manner to her *protégé*: all was sunshine and fair weather, where late there had been the prelude to a storm; she told Border anecdotes, and raked up legends of bygone times with an

enthusiasm that equalled her auditor's; made her bullfinch pipe Eleanor's favourite tune, and ordered her beautiful King Charles's spaniel, Tiny, to eat her biscuits out of Eleanor's lap; even went so far as to bring out from its hiding place, in which it had laid entombed for ages, a huge volume of caricatures and oddities of a bygone period, in which statesmen of the time of the Bute regency, and the Grenville opposition, figured with all the breadth of colouring and grotesqueness, which few but a Gilray or our own inimitable H. B. could excel.

By the morrow Eleanor had quite forgotten the very existence of Mr. Norman Macdonald, and when on their return from an early drive, the groom of the chambers announced that there was company waiting Lady Susan in the blue drawing room, Eleanor suffered herself to be led thither by her companion, without even, for one moment, speculating upon the chances of the obnoxious gentleman's proving to be of the party.

"Come, love, no drawing back," cried Lady

Susan, patting her cheek, as the footman with officious zeal flung wide open the door, and there rushed out upon them a confused Babel of tongues, which at once confused and disconcerted our heroine; "these are nothing but simple country folks, Eleanor, like ourselves;" and then relaxing the grimness of her features into a withered smile, Lady Susan advanced up the room with the stride of a grenadier, exclaiming as she extended one arm, "Sir Price, how d'ye do? Lady Hunter, I'm glad to see you; young ladies, you all look charming. Any weddings, eh, since I left Scotland?" and then, with an ironical smile, the provoking old woman turned to their lady mamma and said, "I always did say, Lady Hunter never would keep her daughters a twelvemonth, after they got up to be the height of her shoulder."

Poor Lady Hunter, who was a perfect giantess, bridled and tried to laugh off the ironical joke of her merciless hostess, who saw nevertheless that the iron rankled in her soul; the four Miss Hunters, poor things, were neither *spirituelle*, nor

handsome, nor witty, although they were abundantly good-natured and officious, in their zeal to make themselves agreeable in the world. They had all come packed in the old, rumbling, family coach from Hunter Lodge—an abominably dull, dreary, monotonous brick house, standing in a great bare field with a dismal sweep straight up to the door, flanked by gaunt poplars, the moment they heard of her ladyship's arrival; where they were all talking, and chattering, and disputing amongst themselves, the moment the door was opened, like a nest of noisy daws or clattering jays.

And there was Mr. Price Hunter too, the only son, tall, and solemn, and grave as an obelisk, with just about as much life in his unmeaning face as a marble tablet; he would be Sir Price, in time, with an estate of two thousand a year saddled by the deceased Sir Price with jointures to his widow, and fortunes to the four red-armed, lanky, silly looking Misses Price Hunters. Eleanor bit her lips in her attempt to keep from laughing when he accosted her,

though she saw that Lady Susan was watching her, and was on her guard accordingly.

“What a time you have been away, Lady Susan!” cried Lady Hunter in a familiar tone, as she settled herself in her seat again, when all the compliments had been paid. “I declare I thought you never would come back. Did I not, Sir Price?”

“You did indeed, Lady Hunter,” said Sir Price, solemnly; “it was only Monday week, no it was Tuesday week, I think, I really can’t be certain, but it might be Monday, after all,” and poor Sir Price, who had a habit of contradicting himself, and who consequently was always in a state of semi-bewilderment, went floundering on, whilst Lady Hunter with a smile she intended to be vastly winning, glanced over to Eleanor and begged that her dear Lady Susan would introduce her to her young guest.

“Eleanor, love, this is Lady Price Hunter,” said Lady Susan, with a smile that Eleanor perfectly understood; and thereupon Lady Hunter kissed her on both cheeks, and pressed her high,

sharp, bony nose upon her forehead, having undershot her mark with that feature, and straightway fell into a perfect ecstasy with her charming Miss Clarendon, whom she hoped at an early day to see at Hunter Lodge; and thereupon the four Miss Hunters smiled and tried to say something polite in imitation of their mamma, the only trace of which was, a husky rattle in those four interesting young ladies' throats; and Sir Price bowed, and smiled, and nodded his head, and tried not to look bewildered; and Mr. Price stretched his crane-like neck and manufactured a withering simper, and thereupon the whole family rose to go.

"I hope we shall have some charming reunions, dear Lady Susan," said Lady Hunter, as they descended the stairs; for poor Lady Hunter strove with all her might to fancy herself on confidential terms with the highborn and lofty Lady Susan Clarendon; "we shall be delighted to see you, my dear Miss Clarendon: always at home, you know, and my four girls are very little older——"

"Miss Baby's only twenty-six," cried Lady Susan, in a high cracked voice, which she always assumed when she had anything bitter to say, tapping the youngest born of the fair Hunteresses, as she spoke, with her Indian fan.

"Ha, ha, how malicious, Lady Susan!" laughed Lady Hunter, striving not to look disconcerted at the look with which her hostess accompanied the words: "but Barbara is only twenty-three, as you very well know. Good morning, good morning," and Sir Price handed his *cara sposa* into the old chocolate-coloured coach, and then their daughters followed, the son taking his place on the box beside the little withered, mountebank-looking coachman, whose little pigtail and saffron-coloured skin made Lady Susan once observe that he looked, for all the world, like a well dried ape, endowed with vital motion again.

"How I hate those people!" cried her ladyship with a grimace, expressive of the deepest disgust, as she took Eleanor's arm in her own, as she ascended the steps of the vestibule; "from such

inroads upon one's time and patience, merciful heaven preserve us; the stupid husband, the bustling, impudent, officious wife, wishing to be hailfellow well met even with me, who am the very *crème de la crème* in comparison; the four red armed, scraggy, old maidish girls, and the gander-looking hopeful, are enough to give me a fit of the blues for a twelvemonth! The only good they do me is, they give one a capital opportunity to get rid of a fit of the spleen."

CHAPTER XI.

For a week after this, Mr. Norman Macdonald's name was never mentioned between Lady Susan and Eleanor; her eccentric ladyship seemed in fact to have forgotten his existence in the business-like bustle and excitement of her own. Once there was a public day at Leven, when every place from the kitchen to my lady's chamber was literally overran with a wild, tumultuous, well-bred mob of fashionables and their attendants, who came to see her ladyship's last acquisition, and to discuss the thousand and one never ending, interminable topics which people who vegetate the one half or more of their existence in the country invariably fly to, to dispel ennui, or disgust, or the spleen.

And still Mr. Norman Macdonald did not

come; Lady Susan at first was mysterious, then grew peevish, and shut herself up a whole evening in her own dressing room, and then began to rail at all the world and at Mr. Norman Macdonald in particular, for a false hearted, unconscionable renegade.

“Why really, Eleanor, you’re quite delighted at the defection of Norman,” said she, laughing gaily for the first time that day, as they sat together after tea one delicious night in June. “Open the window, love, and let us have a breath of the fresh air. Ah, what a delicious perfume! I must have Mackie to put a stand of heliotrope and musk under this window, my dear, it will smell so sweet when we sit here in the evenings.”

“I doat upon heliotrope,” said Eleanor, as she lingered at the window for a moment, watching the golden-tinted sunset; “dear Lady Susan, do come here for one moment ——”

“Why, child? I really can’t leave my chair if it is only for a star or a stray sunbeam; but what is that, Eleanor? the sound of carriage wheels?”

“Yes, I wanted you to look at one of the oddest, most outlandish looking vehicles I ever saw in my life,” said Eleanor, turning away.

“Where, child? why didn’t you tell me so? surely it’s not coming here; a carriage, an outlandish carriage, child?” and Lady Susan jumped up with great agility and rang for lights. “Eleanor, help me on with my shawl; there, there, now then my stick,—so! what a figure I am to see company, eh, child, am I not? who in the name of wonder can it be? send for McGraw, Janet,” addressing her maid: “come, child, and help me to receive my company whoever they be, ghost, or goblin, or howdie, they’re all welcome;” and chattering as she strode forward, in a high key, Lady Susan hurried Eleanor towards the front entrance, evidently in no very good humour at the prospect of her peace and privacy being broken in upon by any uninvited set of guests.

There was a carriage at the door, the steps of which were already down; an odd-looking, mottled faced, white-headed old gentleman, with

his short, squat, stumpy figure dressed in a blue surtout, a striped waistcoat, leather breeches, and top boots, a queue sticking bolt out from the back of his neck, and a black leather belt to show where waist there was none, was standing in front, busily engaged in disentangling from the meshes of a perfect forest of band-boxes, small leather trunks, obstreperous baskets, and a non-descript collection of cloaks, and plaids, and overalls, something that, by the contortions it made in the process, was evidently a human being; which being at last happily accomplished, there stood disclosed to view, as well as numerous shawls and etceteras would permit, a little old lady, with a *chevaux de frise* of black, wiry-looking curls, embattled over a very high, narrow brow, a pair of piercing black eyes, and a sharp angular nose, and even that was wrinkled like everything else about her; more than this, nothing was visible.

“ And what brings you here, Sir Duncan, at such a pretty hour as this?” demanded Lady Susan, in no very gracious tone; “ who told you,

I would like to know, that I was at home, eh?"

"Nobody, Lady Susan," rejoined the old gentleman, taking off his hat to Eleanor, whom he honoured with a very gallant bow. "I really didn't know you were here; Jacobina and myself set off from Dunoon yesterday, and here we are for to-day and part of to-morrow."

"And what if I was to say, Sir Duncan Mackay, Lady Susan Clarendon does not see company just now, and order you to pack off again, eh?" retorted his courteous hostess; "what would you do then?"

"I would say what I'm going to say to Humphrey," retorted the imperturbable old gentleman; "drive the carriage round into the yard, my lad, and see that the horses are well baited. No, no, Lady Susan, I'm not to be taken in at this time of day," and Sir Duncan, who jerked out his words as if every syllable threatened to strangle him, chuckled and pinched Lady Susan's withered cheek, and poked out his arm for his wife to waddle into the house by; nothing could disturb his equanimity.

Eleanor thought, with this new importation of eccentricities, that she must have got into a travelling museum of lunatics, every one of whom seemed to strive only how outrageous, and absurd, and laughable he or she could become; but she had still further occasion to think so before she had been many months domiciled at Leven, and by that time Sir Duncan's originality and brusqueness, and his lady's interminable habit of story telling, and dilating upon all she saw, did, felt, or thought, were well nigh obliterated from her memory.

It was quite evident that Lady Susan hated poor Sir Duncan, but he didn't care one rush for that. Dunoon, where he resided, lay far away to the east of the Lothians, and Leven was just a convenient resting place when they made their annual pilgrimage to the south. There was some old family connexion between Lady Susan and himself, and he was so well accustomed to her peevish vagaries, that he invariably paid her off in her own coin: to Eleanor he was very polite, and more than once waddled after her when she

left the breakfast room for her usual early morning walk, and would come back again by the time he had gained the door, and throw himself down in his chair again with a shrug and a growl, like a pampered lazy spaniel, which he in many things resembled.

Lady Mackay, or Jacobina, as Sir Duncan invariably styled her, sate bolt upright on her sofa all day, talking away, whether any one listened or not, drawing her own inferences from everything she saw or heard; nothing escaped her lynx-like imagination, and she even excelled Lady Susan in spite and spleen.

“Mrs. Thrift’s dead, Lady Susan,” cried Sir Duncan, looking over his newspaper, spectacles on nose, as the three old oddities, looking like three china monsters, sate round Lady Susan’s work table; “poor woman, she’s gone at last!”

“And time enough too,” retorted Lady Susan; “some folks seem as if they never would die, I fancy.”

“Heigho,” yawned Jacobina, “I wonder when it will be our turn.”

Sir Duncan laughed. "Thrift must have died rich."

"Not very, I suspect," rejoined Lady Susan; "he was an extravagant man and had odd ways of frittering away his money."

"Ah, ah! money's easy to spend," babbled Sir Duncan's better half; "Duncan, reach me my bobbin. Sure now, and to think that the Thrifts wern't rich after all, for sure your ladyship knows everything, and you must know whether they were or not."

"Hold your tongue, simpleton," cried Lady Susan, sternly; "who told you, pray, that I said the Thrifts were poor?"

"Oh lauk, I'm sure I don't know; didn't you say so, Lady Susan?" and then she muttered in a very audible whisper to herself, "humph! some folks blow hot and cold in the same breath."

Sir Duncan chuckled, and Lady Susan looked

"Fierce as ten furies,—terrible as hell,"

whilst, the impenetrable Jacobina went on, with her sharp eyes fixed on Lady Susan, "Hit her there, I fancy;" this was spoken as an aside,

and then she added, aloud, "Were you thinking of driving, Lady Susan?"

"No, I don't drive to-day," rejoined her ladyship, sourly.

"Afraid of her complexion, perhaps," muttered her guest; "will you drive, Sir Duncan?"

"I'm not afraid of my complexion; ha! ha!" tittered Lady Susan, "an old woman like poor me! Sir Duncan, do take that poor simpleton of a wife of yours out an airing, and rid ~~me~~ of her company for a while."

Fortunately for Lady Susan's imperturbability, the three days of the Mackay's probation expired; and then the old rumbling, creaking chariot was brought out once more, and Jacobina, encased like an Egyptian mummy, with nothing visible but her eyes, nose, and forehead, surmounted by the double row of knobby curls, was safely stowed away in its sacred interior, with Sir Duncan by her side; and then, with—

"Becks, and bows, and wreathed smiles"—

from Lady Susan, not for their visit but for their

departure, the worthy pair set forward, southward ho ! leaving their splenetic hostess in no slight degree relieved by their absence of a very serious tax on her own patience and *sang-froid*. Even such fools as Jacobina can make themselves obnoxious at times.

“ I will take you to see a very different character, child, to that horrid Lady Mackay,” said Lady Susan, as she despatched a footman to order the pony phaeton out for twelve o’clock ; “ it is always a red-letter day in my calendar when I turn towards Fernilee.”

“ And who lives at Fernilee ? ” demanded Eleanor, who had never even heard the place mentioned before ; “ am I not to have a sketch of the people we are going to visit, before I set foot in their house ? You know, Lady Susan, how apt I am to build castles in the air, and if in the present instance you leave my fancy ‘ maiden free,’ it will certainly tumble down with a terrific crash ere long, and bury us both in its ruins.” “

“ Had not that atrocious Lady Mackay put all my pity to flight, I would have related to you the

singular history of the family at Fernilee, as we drove thither; her antagonism has, however, brought me a fit of the spleen, child, so that for the present you must live in ignorance of it; at some future time, perhaps, I may relent, and enlighten you on the subject."

And then, with the aid of her gold-headed cane and Eleanor's arm, her ladyship descended the stairs, a task with her of some difficulty, owing to an accident she had once suffered when running down stairs late at night, when some lumber had been placed upon them for removal in the morning. As she reached the lowest landing place, where a picture of singular beauty hung, representing a beautiful girl hanging over the senseless form of a youth, on whose rigid, marble features, the cold, clammy hand of death seemed already to hover, her face for a moment flushed over with the deepest crimson, and a heavy sigh broke from her.

"Go on, go on, love, I—I cannot breathe whenever I look at that picture;" and tottering, and trembling, and gasping for breath, Lady

Susan's lips quivered with a ghastly smile, as she felt Eleanor's terrified gaze fixed upon her.

"Why do you look so frightened, child? it was only a spasm," said she the next moment, in an irritable tone.

"I thought the sight of that picture affected you," said Eleanor, with soothing tenderness; "do, dear Lady Susan, let Mr. McGraw remove it to some other place."

"Not for worlds, child—I would almost as soon part with life itself," said she, almost sternly; and then with an altered bitterness of tone she added, "and what is life, that an old woman like me should cling to it so tenaciously?—a gilded cheat; a farce at which all the company have left, and the lamps are going out, and the curtain ready to fall. No, no, child, don't remove that picture, and don't question me about it—I hate interrogatories; and now let us get into the pony carriage; for a breath of fresh air, and the sight of the woods and green fields, and the birds singing around us, will revive me."

The emotion she had recently felt seemed to

have subdued Lady Susan more than was her wont. She threw the reins to her companion as soon as ever she was out of sight of the groom, and then sinking back, she drew her shawl over her head, and remained for many minutes without speaking.

Eleanor did not venture to disturb her. Even in Lady Susan's wayward and violent griefs, there was something that in Eleanor's mind made the object of them sacred; and so when Lady Susan aroused herself again, and threw aside her shawl, Eleanor did not look towards her to see the tears which she knew were standing in those cold, grey, icy eyes, but smacked her whip, and cheered on the two fairy ponies with her voice; and then Lady Susan spoke.

"I'm not using you well, Eleanor; I am sulky and wayward, and peevish, when I ought to be witty, and kind, and entertaining."

There was a truth—a deep-searching, earnest truth in Eleanor Clarendon's silent gaze, that made her shrink back upon herself, and try to laugh at her own words. Eleanor smiled, as she

said, "I did not think you either sulky or peevish."

"No, no, I know you are too good to have such a bad feeling against me; but I feel, nevertheless, Eleanor, that I am—but I cannot always rise above these imperfections. We all have our faults, I fear, and those are some of mine."

"I do not think that to be silent, and even sad, when you are disturbed or out of spirits, is a crime," said Eleanor, seriously; "we all are liable to such attacks, and they, in all probability, are sent by our good geniuses to purge away the very imperfections you so feelingly bewail."

"Eleanor, you should have been a man; a moralist in petticoats is an odious character," cried Lady Susan, abruptly. "Pray now, don't you think that a great deal of good sermonising has been lost in your being a woman?"

"Oh no; I never would be able to scrape theology enough to be a parson," said Eleanor, laughing. "But we grow quite prosy this morning; how charmingly the wood violets smell! and hark! there is a cuckoo."

“ Ah! I have not heard one this year, yet,” said Lady Susan, quietly. “ Eleanor, do you not love our Scottish scenery, with its wild variety of heath, and hill, and dale, and forest? Look down there, to the south, just where there’s a glimpse of sunlight over yon hill,—did you ever see anything more glorious? the purple bloom of the heather; the ground broken into a thousand fantastic shapes; the silvery stems of the firs, that look like feathers in the distance; yon solitary heron, wheeling away to some distant cairn, where some poor lamb has perchance sobbed its last sigh; the little loch in the foreground, lying like molten silver in the sunlight; and above all, the bright, blue sky, flecked with golden clouds. Is not this all beautiful, exceedingly, as Coleridge would say, my love?”

Eleanor’s breath came thick and rapid; she could not stay to analyse her feelings, for, in one word, she felt transported. Lady Susan went on without seeming to notice that she remained silent.

“ When I was a girl, Eleanor, I had the same

rapture for everything that bore nature's impress upon it, that you have now. Ah! age dulls one's love of the beautiful. To be old and passionless, to outlive every enthusiastic feeling of one's youth,—it is like gazing upon a beautiful landscape when the sunset has fled,—the dark shadows are gathering over all, and then the night comes.”

“ Oh, do not talk so sadly, Lady Susan,” said Eleanor, catching her hand, as she finished the sentence; “ even in old age there is, I should fancy, so much to make life dear to us.”

“ Eleanor, when you have outlived all that you have loved,” rejoined her companion, bitterly, “ you will feel like me.”

She turned her head away, and did not resume the conversation. Eleanor felt chilled and rebuffed, she scarcely knew why, and suffered the two graceful ponies to go on at their own easy pace, unnoticed, until a sudden turn of the road recalled her wandering thoughts, and at the same moment, Lady Susan turned her face upon her again. It wore the same cold, stern, impenetrable expression it had so often done before, and

there was a measured dryness in the tones of the sharp voice, that seemed to repulse her auditor's sympathy, as she said, with a movement of her hand,

“Below you, a little to the right, child, is Fernilee.”

Eleanor looked in the direction pointed out: a low, many-windowed cottage, with its gable ends clad with rose and jessamine, and its rustic porch embowered with creepers, stood on a broad, flat terrace, in front of which a small stream, like a silver thread, kept its winding way; two noble elm trees flanked the rude, yet not inelegant, gateway that led to this rural abode of peaceful plenty; the turf that stretched away from the long-sashed windows was as smooth as velvet, and now in its budding beauty, with its orchard of apple and pear trees, just bursting into luxuriant bloom, Eleanor thought that she had never beheld any scene that more attracted her admiration.

There was a long, perilous lane to be traversed before they reached this sylvan paradise, however,

which threatened very serious damage to Lady Susan's elegant fairy vehicle; a lane where the hazel-bushes were, bursting into leaf, and wood-violets and primroses grew in gigantic clusters from the root of every tree; and where the active robin and the sooty blackbird were hopping from twig to twig, nowise scared by human intruders. It was a work of some difficulty and no little nice chariotceering on Eleanor's part, to get through all this without accident; and when the carriage was at last drawn up in front of the gate, she turned to Lady Susan with a flushed yet smiling countenance, and her ladyship said,

“Bravo, Eleanor! your first essay in driving is not so bad. Older hands than yours have made a worse exhibition here, I can tell you.”

“What an imposing looking old man!” whispered Eleanor, as the door opened, and an old gentleman came down the long, beautifully kept garden; “how venerable that mass of white hair makes him!”

“Ah, child! Eric Dennison's mind makes him ten times more venerable than his white hairs,”

said Lady Susan, quietly ; “ and yet, philosopher though he be, I must own he is quite a patriarch in his appearance. He has a complexion like winter berries : eyes with all the dark fire of youth still burning in them ; and though his face has many a wrinkle that time and sorrow have ploughed in it, his brow is smooth as alabaster. He is an old man,—older than me,—and yet how erect he walks ! ”

Lady Susan would have said more, but Mr. Dennison was now very near them.

“ You have stolen a march upon me, Lady Susan,” said he, extending both hands, on gaining their side ; “ had I known you were at Leven again, I would have ridden over to pay my devoirs.”

“ Ah, Eric, that is always your excuse,” said Lady Susan smiling ; “ but this time I don’t regret you were ignorant of my return. I have brought my niece, Miss Eleanor Clarendon, to see you.”

Eric bowed with all the exploded gallantry of the times of his youth, as he turned from Lady Susan to our heroine. It became his silvery locks,

and his knee-breeches and buckles ; and Eleanor felt that she could love him. His simplicity was that of a wise man condescending to be a child ; and Eleanor revered him for it.

“ You will get out and see Lucy,” said he, with another bow ; and Lady Susan said they would, it was so long since she had seen Miss Dennison, that she never could forgive herself if she left Fernilee without doing so now.

Eric tendered his arm to his antiquated friend, apologising to Eleanor at the same time, that his walks were so narrow as to prevent them all walking abreast. Eleanor did not regret this, as it gave her an opportunity of observing him more at her ease ; and as they moved slowly up the garden, lingering every here and there, to give Eric an opportunity to point out some favourite plant just bursting into bloom, to Lady Susan’s notice, Eleanor could not but feel struck at the difference between Lady Susan’s tall bony figure, arrayed in a costume at once grotesque and unbecoming her age, and the simple and modest attire of her host.

At the arbour-embowered door they were met by Eric's housekeeper, his last surviving child, Lucy Dennison. Lucy's hair was grey already ; and there was a solemnity, not to say a sadness, in features that must once have been eminently handsome, which at once won Eleanor's sympathy. But alas ! Lucy was an old maid : one of that honoured, and abused, and maligned army of martyrs who, from the time that David danced before the ark, or earlier, have been the objects of scorn and contempt to their more happily mated neighbours.

Poor, poor Lucy ! who could have known that beneath that white muslin kerchief throbbed a heart so earnest and faithful in its love !—that that meek, gentle-looking woman had braved the contumely and contempt of the world for one who was lying many a fathom deep in the Indian seas.

But Lady Susan Clarendon is much too important a personage to keep waiting, and Lucy is now ushering her into the large, roomy parlour, the cushioned bay-window of which commands a glorious prospect of the surrounding country.

"It is almost a sin to go near the fire such a day as this," cried her ladyship, appropriating to herself, nevertheless, the warmest corner of the couch; "and now, Eric, come and sit by me. You are a capital listener, and Lucy can show all the lions to Eleanor."

"I will only order lunch, and then Miss Clarendon and I will leave you," said Lucy, ringing a handbell.

"I never eat lunch, child," rejoined Lady Susan, peevishly; "so, get away immediately, for I've a great deal to say to your father."

Thus addressed, Lucy rose to lead the way; but unfortunately, as she opened the door, a lovely, merry, arch little elf burst into the room, hugging in her arms a sharp, wiry-looking, cross-grained terrier, exclaiming, with the lisping *naïveté* of childhood—

"Luthey! Luthey! Whisk—nauthy dog—Whisk almosth knothed Maggy down. Nauthy Whisk!"

"Oh fie, Maggy! run away again, love," said Lucy, patting her upon the head.

“ Maggy not go away,” cried the child, pouting her cherry lip; “ me go to papa,” and then setting down the dog, which ran towards the couch, she flung her fat, chubby arms round Eleanor’s neck, and offered her dimpling mouth to be kissed.

“ Whose child is that, Eric ? ” demanded Lady Susan, peering through her glass at the lovely little fairy; “ what a picture ! Don’t stir, Eleanor, —your dark hair mixing with those golden curls—”

But the golden curls did not hear the adjuration, for the next moment they were swept over Eleanor’s neck, and Maggy flew to the old man, with a cry of delighted recognition.

“ Who is that horrible, nathy old woman, papa ? Whath you come here for ? ” demanded the little monkey, eyeing Lady Susan’s wrinkled, cross-looking, peaked visage, with a stare of astonishment; “ Maggy don’t love you.”

“ If I had you, my little lady,” cried her ladyship, with a stern smile, “ I should teach you how to designate your elders.”

“Maggy don’t love you,” reiterated the child.

“Maggy, go to aunt Lucy,” said Eric Dennison, putting the child away from him; and poor Maggy, in tearful silence, complied.

“That is my poor boy’s little one,” said he, with a sigh, as Lucy and her companions left the room. “We had not heard tidings from him for years, and now we have but just heard that he was alive in time to receive his last farewell, and to protect the tender years of his little girl.”

Eric had many and bitter griefs lying heavy at his heart. He had been wealthy, and honoured, and happy; he had been courted for his matchless talents, and revered for his piety and wisdom; he had seen his table crowded with seven noble sons and daughters, and had heard the voices of many children—that sweetest of sounds, to a parent’s ear—in his mansion; and yet one short year had robbed him of all,—wealth, and station, and children,—the wife of his bosom, and the homage of the world; and yet there was the same sweet smile on his venerable countenance, the same earnest hopefulness in his cheery voice, the

same flashing fire in his dark eye. Sorrow, and age, and neglect, could not extinguish the light within, and he was happy still.

“Will you come sometimes to Fernilee?” said Lucy, as soon as they were in the fragrant garden once more; “I feel that I shall love you already.”

“Why?” demanded Eleanor, smiling.

“It would require a philosopher like my father to answer such a question; perhaps, because Maggy has singled you out for one of her favourites;” and the gentle-hearted Lucy looked towards Miss Maggy, who was running races with her dog.

“Does Lady Susan come often to Fernilee?” demanded Eleanor.

“I must answer yes and no to that query,” rejoined her companion, smiling. “Lady Susan is in nothing more capricious than in her visits. Sometimes she will drive over every other day for a month; and then she will never come near for a very long time.”

Eleanor did not look surprised, for she began

to understand her ladyship's freaks, now; "I hope we shall meet very frequently," said she, turning towards the house.

"Thank you for that," said Lucy, pressing her hand; "there is Mabel looking out to say luncheon is ready," and she walked towards the house at a rapid pace.

They found Lady Susan ready shawled to go; and it was in vain that Lucy implored, and Eric entreated, that they would take some refreshment after their long drive. Eleanor was pained at Lady Susan's obstinacy; but her ladyship was invincible, and marched off, humming an old reel-tune, without once noticing Lucy's air of chagrin, nor Eric's offended dignity of manner.

"I shall see you both on Tuesday," said she, in a tone that plainly enough betokened that a refusal was quite out of the question; "I have a whole menagerie full of wild beasts to let loose in my den."

"And poor Lucy and myself are to be thrown amongst them, to fill their hungry maws," rejoined Eric, smiling.

“No, no; you’re more decent folks, and, in the main, Eric, deserve a better fate,” said Lady Susan, patting him on the shoulder. “Lucy must come up early in the day to help me. I will send the pony-phaeton for you, child. You, Eric, prefer walking, as I very well know. Good-bye, all good folks. Mind you come soon, child. Whip that little minx, Eric, if you’re wise; spare the rod, you know. Come, Eleanor, are you in a dream?” and, with a gesture expressive of leave-taking, Lady Susan closed her eyes, and lay back, with her hands crossed over her knees, until they were half way back to Leven again.

CHAPTER XII.

POOR Herbert! a wild and stormy boyhood seemed reserved for him. Cecil had found a friend and protector in whom he could confide, ~~if it were necessary~~, had not his own precocious manhood appeared to forbid the necessity of such a stay. But Herbert, still but a boy, with his singular temperament, in which impetuosity and timidity, bravery and meekness, were mingled with an artlessness that had made him the darling of poor Colonel Clarendon; what could be expected from him, but that he would be submissive, and tractable, and obedient in the hands of his supple, crafty, and unprincipled guardian.

“The child will be as easily managed as an infant,” said Jasper Vernon, as he sat toasting

his lean legs in front of the fire, in the library at Delaval. "It is a great waste of money sending him back to Eton, now; the money will come in famously when the whelp needs his outfit for college, and a private tutor now,—some poor, needy wretch, training up for a Welch curacy,—will be far cheaper. Yes, that must be the plan, and then I'll have the dog under my own wing too," and so Jasper drank off his claret and rang the bell.

A footman answered the summons.

"Ah, John—let me see—" and Jasper Vernon sec-sawed in his chair in studied abstraction, for the semblance of power was new to this sordid Clarendon cousin, and he liked to feel his new authority; "ah, yes; send Master Herbert here, immediately, John."

"Master Herbert is—I beg your pardon, sir—did you say Master Herbert?" stammered the man, who had a vague suspicion that Jasper was a haughty tyrant, and feared him accordingly.

"Yes, sir, I said Master Herbert," replied the

executor, rubbing his legs; "is the boy not in the house?"

Now, if the truth must be told, Herbert was not in the house, having gone off with the keeper, early in the afternoon, on his rounds, and had not yet come back. The man dared not tell this to the new bashaw, although the colonel never forbade either Cecil or his younger son doing so; and so he stammered, and then said Master Herbert might be in the gallery.

"For he takes on woundily at losing Master Cecil and Miss Eleanor," said the man, bluntly, "and maybe he's rambled away out into the grounds, as he al'ays did when he was put out, like."

"A strange fancy for such a child," thought Mr. Jasper Vernon, balancing the nut-crackers (for he was still lingering over a late dessert), whilst he eyed the man sideways, with his lynx-like eyes; "such whims must be checked for the time to come," then jumping abruptly up, he said in a loud voice,

"I want to see Master Herbert, immediately;

if he is not in the house, send through the grounds for him; and harkee, my man, I'm not a person to brook delay, and the sooner the boy comes, the better it will be for all parties."

The footman found himself outside the door in a twinkling, and with a portentous face he presently appeared in the housekeeper's room, to communicate the terrible intelligence conveyed in Jasper's last words.

"I always disliked the wretch, ever since he came among us," said the old housekeeper, with a toss of her head.

"A mean, cantankerous, undermining sneak," chimed in the butler.

"A precious impudent varlet," echoed the late colonel's valet.

"Mr. Vernon is a singular man," summed up Mr. Simpson, the steward, with the measured caution of a man who wishes to retain his place—all the rest were leaving, for Delaval was going to be shut up, and the establishment disbanded—"but however, one thing is certain, Master Herbert must be found immediately. Here,

Robert, send a couple of the helpers out; they know Bagg's rounds best,—this is excellent carafie, Mrs. Tulip," as he drank to the house-keeper's health.

Twice, nay thrice had Jasper Vernon's bell rang, and yet no Herbert was forthcoming. There was a storm brewing in the Vernon horizon, evidently, and woe be to the wight on whom it was doomed to burst.

"Has the child not come yet?" demanded he almost fiercely, of the trembling footman, at the third summons.

"No, sir; we've sent out two more men."

"Hang the men: the boy cannot have run away," growled Jasper, in a guttural tone. "You can go; I will ring if I want you, and mind, the moment Master Herbert comes in——"

"I understand you, sir,—march him in here," interposed the man, anxious to avert the storm from himself.

Jasper nodded, and as the man closed the door, a darker cloud than usual gathered on his

sallow wrinkled brow. At length he became alarmed. What if after all the boy had, as he surmised, absconded. Here was a new and perplexing predicament to be placed in, and the cold sweat stood on his forehead as he started up from his chair again, kicking it over in his impatience, as he paced the room with rapid strides. Fortunately for himself, his surmises were not correct, for Herbert soon after returned, in company with the keeper and the two helpers who had been first sent out, soiled, tired, flushed, and worn out with fatigue.

In this plight he was ushered into the awful presence of his future guardian, every crease and fold of whose sable garments seemed charged with passion. Like a merciless tiger pouncing pell mell on a defenceless lamb, the door was no sooner closed, than he clutched poor Herbert by the arm, and demanded why he had the audacity to stay out until such shameful hours, when every one in the house was so wretched about him, giving him a vigorous shake with his bony hand, as he spoke.

Herbert was a brave-hearted lad, and he hated Jasper Vernon already, by intuition.

"Why do you use me so, Mr. Vernon?" cried he, striving to disentangle himself from the tiger's clutches; "papa never gave you so much power over me."

"Herbert—sirrah!" stammered Jasper, quite aghast at such audacity in a child, "this—this to—to me!"

"Yes, sir; papa never would have given you so much power—oh, my dear papa!" and poor Herbert burst into a flood of tears.

"Herbert, you have been very naughty," said Jasper Vernon, after an awkward pause; "I cannot, that is to say, I must not allow such laxity in future."

"I never was naughty when dear papa was alive," sobbed the child, with hysterical grief; and then gulping down his tears, he turned upon Jasper a look so determinedly daring and defying, that that worthy was staggered once more. "I will tell Cecil, sir, of you," said he, knitting his little brows, and clenching his hands with

boyish anger; "Cecil will not allow you to treat me so."

For a moment, Jasper Vernon forgot that it was a child that stood before him; the slight figure seemed to dilate and swell into athletic manhood; the chest seemed to throb with more than childish passion; the fair brow grew broad, and stern, and threatening; Herbert's beautiful eyes seemed to flash with the fire and indignation of the man; and then it sunk and collapsed, and dwindled away again, and Herbert, a passionate and determined boy, stood before him with clenched hands, quivering frame, tearful eyes, and a sulky and lowering brow.

"Herbert," said he, taking the child's hand gently in his own, as with the other he parted the clustering chestnut hair from the beautiful brow, "your papa left you to my care, on his death-bed; he thought you were good, and gentle, and amiable, and as such I accepted the charge."

He felt the little hot hand trembling in his own as he continued,

"Herbert, your dear papa was a good man;

he loved you dearly, and for that reason it was that he entreated me to be a father to you."

Poor Herbert's eyes filled with tears, and he began to sob violently as his tormentor said, as he arose,

"I go away from here to-morrow, my dear; I am going down into Somersetshire, and will take you with me. I don't think you like Eton, my boy, and so we will have a private tutor for you, until you get grown to be a big boy and old enough to go to college: this will be much pleasanter than being at a great school, I think—and now I will say, good night."

He released the trembling hand, and tried to smile kindly on the boy: it was a very poor effort, however, and he felt that he was failing miserably. Herbert, boy as he was, felt that Mr. Jasper Vernon was deceiving him, and so in sulky silence he suffered him to lead him to the door.

"You will have a pony to ride—I really think we had better have your own fine little fellow, Tippoo, sent down for your use, eh, Herbert?" and he chuckled the boy roguishly under the chin,

There was deception even in this bit of by-play, and when Herbert had marched off as sulky as ever, Jasper doomed him to perdition with a thousand oaths, and returned to the darkened room, to weave his own plots and counter-plots for the busy future.

On the morrow, punctually at the hour of ten, Mr. Jasper Vernon's carriage, a dull, dingy, sombre-looking vehicle, lined with drab, and dragged by a couple of lean, ugly, ill-bred horses, stood at the door. Mr. Jasper Vernon, leading poor Herbert by the hand, passed through the double file of servants who lined the entrance hall, solemn and grave, yet condescending withal, as one who knew how high was the pinnacle on which he stood, and how far he could stoop from its heights to those beneath. He was sallow and dismal, and withal, very ugly; so that no one felt prepossessed towards him, as they would have done had he looked like a gentleman, which all said could be very well seen he was not.

And poor Herbert! he had wanted to shake

hands and say good-bye with every one, and here was this hypocritical cousin of the Clarendon's walking, as the ogre in the fairy tale, like his evil genius beside him, to force him on. His little heart was full, for he heard sobs all around him, and he was parting from all he had ever loved. And yet the inherent pride of his heart kept the tears from swelling up to his eyes: nay, he even smiled around him as he passed out, for he would not have them think that he was afraid of Jasper Vernon. But the struggle was too much for him, and the moment he got into the carriage, he flung himself into one corner, and sobbed as if his heart would break, until they were miles away from Delaval.

Oh, the miseries, solemn, and dismal, and depressing, of that weary journey! Jasper Vernon never moved, nor spoke, nor even smiled, but sat bolt upright, like an animated poker, in his own corner, gazing upon vacancy, without the shadow of an expression on his face. There was no book to wile away the dismal ennui; no tales of school pranks extorted from Herbert

in confidence, of which his auditor told tales, in turn, of adventures and scrapes not one whit less culpable because they were the sins of a grown up man. Jasper Vernon hated fables; but Colonel Clarendon, gay-hearted, and brave, and worldly as he was, loved them, and Herbert, in whose memory there yet lingered the recollection of a journey performed with the latter, sighed to think how often he had laughed at his papa's mishaps in Flanders, and had hung entranced and horror-stricken over his adventures and sufferings in Switzerland: and in contrast to all this there was Jasper Vernon, with his lankey, black hair, and his cadaverous cheeks, and his solemn dress, sitting speechless and dumb beside him.

When they halted at a post town to change horses, it was even worse, for Jasper always had an altercation with the post-boys as to the amount of gratuity to be paid them, and Herbert was regaled with many muttered farewells, expressive of the postilion's hatred of stingy gentlefolks, who didn't think it a disgrace to cheat a

poor man of his hard-earned wages. But for no curse cared Jasper, storm, and curse, and swear as they pleased. Every sixpence wrung from them was sixpence saved to him, and he held their words very cheap, and his face expressed it too.

Herbert sighed to think of Cecil, whom he fancied to be his own master, wandering where he pleased, and enjoying himself just as the humour took him; and at the very moment Cecil was thinking of him going off to Eton again. Jasper wondered why the boy's eyes filled so often with tears: it was so silly to cry, and quite a waste of the animal economy, thought Jasper, and it didn't do the least good,—and Jasper's looks at that moment seemed qualified to wither a peppercorn.

It was only a prolongation of the misery, when they got to Jasper Vernon's place in Somersetshire, a high, narrow, brick house that looked like a hospital, meagerly furnished with straight-backed chairs and uncouth tables, as black as if they had never held anything but

funeral dinners, and hard, lumpy sofas and vapid curtains, that filtered the daylight through them until even it grew morose, and dismal, and dreary too. There were no famous pack of hounds, no kennels, no stables, no terraces, no gardens, no noisy retinue of servants, such as there were at Delaval. Instead of a court-yard, there was a yard with the grass growing between the flags, in which a melancholy bull-dog howled half the night through, at imaginary noises. And the paddock in front of the house had Jasper's milch cows feeding in it, both of them old and lean as well; and there were dismal portraits of judges and divines hanging up in the sitting-rooms in black, varnished frames, which, as the light was never very strong in such cheerful dungeons, were magnified in the boy's apprehension into fantastically frightful examples of Jasper's peculiar tastes, and he hated them accordingly.

There were prayers night and morning, at which Jasper himself officiated; not the beautifully simple, heartfelt outbreathings of a family, gathered together to offer up their

petitions to the eternal throne; but the empty, and hollow, and false pretensions of sanctity, in which Jasper Vefnon clothed himself in the eyes of his fellow men — there were Sunday tasks, which differed from those of the week, only, in that they were ten times as long, and wearisome and stupid; and above all, Herbert, who yearned for society and sympathy in those of his own age, found it not; for Jasper's house was not the rendezvous of young people—no merry, roguish, mischief-loving lads ever came within its holy precincts; the very walls would have quivered and shook with pious horror, as they groaned out an anathema upon the intruders, —and poor Herbert was indeed desolate.

And when the tutor did come — Herbert thought he never would—matters were not one whit improved; weeks passed away, and every week Jasper professed to wonder and speculate when Mr. Boodle would come. He was really growing quite afraid that Herbert was forgetting everything he had learned, if indeed, Mr. Boodle had not to unlearn him everything on his arrival;

it really was extremely improper conduct of Mr. Boodle, and if he had not had the highest recommendations from a gentleman on whom he could rely, he really would not permit Mr. Boodle to come at all.

But Mr. Boodle did come, when he was least expected, and Jasper was in ecstasies. Mr. Boodle had red hair, and white cheeks, and greenish grey eyes, and mouldy, weak-looking whiskers, which had a perpetual warfare to be seen with a contumaciously upstart shirt collar; and Mr. Boodle wore a white neck-cloth, which made him look like a ranter, and used spectacles, for he was very short sighted. Mr. Boodle dressed in rusty black too, and the tones of Mr. Boodle's voice made the blood run cold in your veins, for Mr. Boodle had very proper notions about the vanity of sublunary matters, and Mr. Boodle was prosy and kept up a continual diluted milk and water strain, which exactly suited Jasper Vernon, and by no means suited Herbert's taste; and Mr. Boodle had a lean body, and spindle legs, and wore gaiters, and had splay-

feet, which were always treading upon other people's. Ah, poor Job Boodle was a dismal specimen of humanity, indeed, for Herbert to study human nature with, at the outset of his career.

How he fagged the poor lad! Lessons before breakfast and after, then a walk and more lessons. Latin, and Greek, and French, and Italian, for Mr. Boodle was a polyglott in himself, and thought that all the world lay within the limits of Dr. Porson and the Greek choruses, and that there was nothing higher, and nobler, and better to live for in the world, than to pore over old musty records of a byegone people, whilst Shakspeare, and Milton, and Wordsworth lay unopened before him.

And every one sang the praises of Job Boodle. "A second Porson," cried Jasper Vernon, rubbing his bony hand enthusiastically whenever he came into the school room, where Herbert and Boodle were at work. "Ah, Herbert, cherish Mr. Boodle, and you will beat the whole bench of bishops, my boy."

And then Mr. Job Boodle would shake his

huge ears and vouchsafe a sickly smile, as he disclaimed the compliment, and Jasper would shuffle away to read over his last letters from Delaval, where a new steward had been appointed in the room of the honest Mr. Simpson, who had thrown up his situation in disgust at the meanness of his new master.

But Herbert felt that this sickening state of existence could not continue long, and he soon grew weary of hearing Mr. Boodle's sepulchral voice, and of seeing him creeping stealthily into his bedroom in the early mornings, with his ugly red hair combed straight over his mean forehead, and his prim, precise, ready-cut and dried, "Good morning, Master Herbert; ready for your studies, my boy?—the industrious sun is already high in the heavens, (if it rained in torrents it was always the same,) and young men ought to emulate that luminary." And then Job Boodle coughed, and hemmed, and stood at the window until he had crawled lazily out of bed, when he would go away to lie in wait for him in the cold school room below.

At last Herbert's detestation of such a hateful and monotonous existence burst its barriers, and he determined to make his escape from such a hateful scene of thralldom; he hoarded up his little store of pocket money, and with a heart throbbing with hope, awaited the first favourable opportunity to put his plan into execution. It was already summer, and though he had not the remotest idea whither to direct his steps, he never hesitated for a moment to calculate consequences, but resolved upon trusting to chance, or fortune, to befriend him.

Had Herbert been seventeen instead of seven, he would never have dreamed of such a wild chimera, but he was only a child, and who that can wing his memory back to that guileless and innocent time, cannot believe that to a child whose sole knowledge of the world was confined to the admiring and caressing visitors at his father's table, every house is an asylum for him to fly to, and a sanctuary from oppression; it is only when we are men that we learn to mistrust!

“To-morrow, Master Clarendon, we will com-

mence Terence," said Mr. Boodle, solemnly, as he bade his pupil good night. "Terence, sir," turning to Jasper Vernon, "Terence is the most extraordinary example——"

Of what Herbert did not stay to hear, for he had closed the door and slunk off without a candle to his little bed-room. It was a bright moonlight, and by drawing the blind up to the top he could catch a glimpse of the dark walnut presses, and the little book case, and the few old pictures with which the walls were hung. Herbert flung up the window, and leaning his arms upon the sill, lay looking out upon the quiet scene, and the bright sky above and around him. The night air was balmy and mild, and the very wind, as it whistled and sighed around him, seemed to whisper hope, courage, and resolution.

He had fallen into a reverie, perhaps he had fallen asleep, and might have been dreaming, for he was cold, and chill, and stiff when he aroused himself and looked around him. He could see lights in the distance, as if of a village, and looking in again, the silence, and quiet, and

gloom, of the room, terrified him so much that, with a palpitating heart he crept to the door, and looked over the balustrade; everything was quiet, the servants had evidently retired to rest, for it was in reality nearly midnight; and so Herbert, after lingering for a moment endeavouring to determine what to do, stole back again, and taking a little bundle in which he had tied up a few clothes, and his prayer book in his hand, crept back again.

It was fully a quarter of an hour before he dare venture to stir, but re-assured by the silence of everything around him, he stole down a step or two.

How the stairs creaked beneath even his light tread! Herbert had never noticed them do so before, and yet every plank he trode upon seemed to cry out, as if to discover him to his jailors. He would have given worlds to turn back, but the remembrance of that dark, silent, lonely room, rooted him to the spot—people might have died in it, and their ghosts might haunt it, and before these terrible phantoms Jasper Vernon and the

pedantic Boodle sank into insignificance, and he crept on again.

And yet, even the staircase had a ghostly look about it, with the cold moonlight falling in long shadows on the wall, through the narrow windows. Herbert shivered and shook with terror and still he crept on; suddenly a door opened lower down, and Herbert heard Jasper Vernon's creaky boots coming towards him—Herbert knew that it was him, for his boots always creaked—what was he to do? to fly back again and bury himself in his room under the bed clothes—to stand where he was and be discovered, and punished accordingly; either were terrible—for both would bring upon him the full measure of Jasper's vengeance, which he had sense enough to know would in this instance be fiendish.

He looked around him in despair—a couple of paces farther on, close to Jasper Vernon's dressing room, stood an old Indian cabinet, a huge, grotesque, mis-shapen thing, with half a dozen sides, rambling in and out in all directions, behind which he had once before ensconced himself, after

committing some trifling fault; and behind this Herbert crept, with his heart beating almost loud enough for Jasper Vernon to hear, had he known who was concealed behind it.

And then, all at once Herbert grew calm, and composed, and resolute, for he was constitutionally brave, and through the chinks of the cabinet he peered until he saw Jasper approaching, eyeing everything right and left as he came, as if he expected to confront a thief at every gaze; under his arm he carried a bundle of papers, in one hand he held a candlestick, whilst the other grasped a small pocket pistol, on which he continually gazed whenever he chanced to look down; he was haggard, and looked very ill, and his dressing gown hung in loose folds around his miserable figure, but there was the same habitual sneer hovering about his jaws, which we have described before.

Herbert saw him pause, and look up the stairs with a quick, distrustful gaze, ere he turned into his room, and then he was only conscious of the light having disappeared, by the shutting and bolting of Jasper Vernon's door.

Many minutes elapsed, almost an hour, before Herbert ventured forth from his hiding place, for his quick ear told him that Jasper had not yet retired into the inner room, and until that event took place, he durst not venture to continue his progress. At length all was quiet, and grasping his bundle, once more he stole out upon the landing place, and then, silently and noiseless as a spirit, crept away. It was a matter of no small difficulty to escape from a house, the master of which, by the vigilant care he took to prevent an attack from without, had everything so strongly barricaded within. The front door was double locked and bolted, and the dining room shutters were too heavy for him to move,—he was nearly giving up in despair, when he remembered the window of the school-room, which was easily opened, and not very far from the ground; to his great joy he found the door open, and with less caution than he had hitherto used he flung open the window, and was about to leap upon the sill, when Jasper Vernon's dog began to bark violently—in an instant he heard the door above opened,

and caught the heavy sound of Jasper's foot descending the stairs; he paused at the first landing, and after the lapse of a few moments returned to his room again, convinced that it had been a false alarm.

A few moments after, Herbert lowered himself to the ground, and creeping along under the shadow of the wall, did not trust himself to run until the paddock was between him and the house.

The air was deliciously calm and sweet, myriads of angels' eyes seemed to look down upon him from the azure vault of heaven above him, the blustering breeze that came laden with a thousand balmy odours, whispered hope and resolution in his ear—he was alone with God in the world!

CHAPTER XIII.

LINDEN was gloomy and reserved when sitting over his hurried breakfast with Cecil the next morning; he looked fagged and dispirited, and for the first time during their intercourse, betrayed symptoms of impatience at Cecil's *bonhomie*. The moment after he had done so, however, he seemed to be anxious to atone for his unkindness, and Cecil did not again detect the wandering eye and abstracted air, which had heretofore on this occasion characterised him.

“And now, Cecil, for unravelling the mystery, for something beyond the mere hope of booty has incited this attack of last night;” and as Linden spoke, his lofty brow grew dark and contracted, and his lips moved, spasmodically.

“Sibbett has given me the address of the nearest magistrate, and as I have ordered the constables to take our prisoners over to his house, we will at once walk over thither, as our depositions will be necessary at the examination.

He rose as he spoke, and reaching down his hat, took Cecil's arm and led the way through the inn garden out upon a bridle path, which led to the magistrate's house. The morning air was fresh and bracing, and a thousand delicious perfumes were wafted past on the balmy air, which soon routed the langour and weariness that oppressed Cecil's frame. The walk they traversed was only such as the southern English counties can produce—a walk, matted over with the greenest of mosses, running between high banks from which the crowsfoot, and the rathe primrose, and the oxlip grew luxuriantly at the foot of every old tree; whilst a brawling brook overhung with alder and hazel bushes, foamed and whirled over its pebbly bed, lending a wild fantastic beauty, to a scene which had otherwise

been tamely beautiful. Every step they took unfolded some new scene of sylvan loveliness, some sunny coppice, where a perfect choir of blackbirds were making the welkin ring with their flute-like song; or some far winding vista in the woodland glade, where the timid hare couched on its form, and the shadows lay deep on the upland lone.

Cecil had all this to himself, for Linden, in truth, never turned his gaze right nor left, but walked on with his chin up in the air, stern and silent, scarcely breaking in upon his companion's musings, but with some observations which only sufficed to show how far removed from his thoughts was all that was around them. Cecil noted all this in silence, and remembered it years afterwards, when subsequent events had unravelled the mystery that hung about that day's proceedings.

He was not sorry when the magistrate's house did come in sight, as he was heartily sick of the monotony of their walk, although he scarcely noticed the plain brick mansion entirely

devoid of all ornament, they were now approaching. Linden's abstraction lasted until they had traversed the dull gravel sweep, flanked by a smooth shaven lawn, unrelieved by a single shrub; but Cecil thought that the arm that rested on his own trembled, as they stood for a brief space in the portico, whilst waiting an answer to the summons of the bell.

A grave servant in a drab livery (and very sober and sad, that looked, too,) came to the door, who ushered them into a small library, where he desired them to wait until he had acquainted his master of their arrival. There was something about the whole air of the house, the hurrying, bewildered manner of the two or three domestics whom they passed in their way thither, that struck them both at the same moment; every thing seemed topsy-turvy about the place, which was ludicrously in contrast with the palpable air of prim neatness and order every where apparent. The man, however, was gone in an instant, and neither of them had an opportunity of inquiring the cause.

After a long delay; during which the only incidents that occurred to enliven its tedium was the slamming of a great many doors, and the running to and fro of the servants, the door opened, and a head was thrust into the room, and then immediately withdrawn, the door being shut resolutely to, as if the intruder had made some great mistake and considered that the only way to rectify it.

“Very strange people, these, Cecil,” said Linden, smiling; “I should remember that white face and the spectacles any where again.”

He had scarcely ceased speaking before the head appeared again. It was this time followed by a body dressed in rusty black, and Cecil then saw that the body was lank, and somewhat ungainly in its movements, which it endeavoured to conceal by a studied solemnity of manner, that by no means imposed upon those in whose company it now found itself.

“Mr. Vernon presents his compliments, gentlemen, and deeply regrets he cannot transact any justice business this morning,” said this

gentleman, with great gravity. "He is extremely unwell."

"What are we to do then, sir?" asked Linden, equally grave, "We are, as you are perhaps aware, merely passing through this part of the country, and wish to be detained as short a time as possible on our way. We cannot wait until to-morrow, and a written deposition in case of attempted outrage like the present, I believe, is invalid in the eye of the law."

"Squire Foxton is a magistrate as well as Mr. Vernon," said the other, rather embarrassed, "and, if you would be kind enough to step down to the Hall, would I am sure be happy to receive your evidence, sir."

"Is this Mr. Vernon's house," inquired Linden, with an air of curiosity?

"Yes, sir, Mr. Jasper Vernon's."

"Oh, indeed! In that case we will not intrude upon his privacy," said Linden with a sarcastic smile; "Mr. Foxton's is the old house in the park we passed on our way thither, I suppose."

"If you came from the Inn, sir."

“ Very well,—good morning ;” and Linden drew Cecil away.

“ This is rather a different looking place to that we have just left,” said Linden, as a pair of very handsome entrance gates, opened by a pretty girl, who emerged from an entrance lodge for the purpose, admitted them into grounds of some extent, and ornamented with some fine old timber, whilst here and there a few deer showed themselves for a moment in the distance. “ We shall at least find a gentleman of the old school here, if nothing more. The Squire evidently does not like innovations, judging by the age of his trees.’

“ Ha ! and there is a kennel too,” said Cecil, as a side-path disclosed a rather formidable range of stabling and kennels ; “ this Mr. Foxton, I’ll be bound, is a keen sportsman.”

“ So much the better. I prefer a genuine blunt, straightforward, fox-hunting Justice, to a canting, psalm-singing one like Mr. Vernon, vastly,” cried Linden emphatically.

“ You know Mr. Vernon, then ?” asked Cecil.

“ I do ; how or where I met him I will tell you

another time," said Linden, colouring. "Halloo, my man!" addressing a man in the garb of a gamekeeper, "is Mi. Foxton at home?"

"Anan!" said the man, looking puzzled.

"Your master, I mean," quoth Linden, smiling.

"Oh, the Squire! Yes, for sartain he be i'the justice-room just now, I warrant," said the man; "we only know him by the name of the Squire, or Squire Foxton, as he be sometimes called. Lord bless you, sir, nobody hereabout would know who you meant, if you asked after Mr. Foxton."

"Thank you; there's a shilling for you;" and Linden turned on his heel.

"This is only a plain house for such a demesne as the Squire's, as our friend in the velveteen jacket called his master," said Linden, pausing in front of the hall;—"one sees a hundred such every day."

"We do, and yet how comfortable and homelike it is!" said Cecil, surveying the long low house, with its bay windows embowered in creeping

plants—its low broad door opening upon the wide entrance hall, which stood invitingly exposed to view—the trim quaint garden, with its terraces and flower-beds filled with old-fashioned flowers, such as stocks and wallflowers, pinks and marjoram, and sweetbriar, and the old triton that threw up a pleasant shower of spray from the fountain in front of the house. “I for one could spend all my days in such a place very pleasantly.”

“We will ask his worship if he will sell his ancestral home, after we get our business done,” said Linden, with his quiet sarcastic smile; “come, let us see if the inside of the house corresponds with the out;” and he strode into the thickly matted hall.

It was low and wide, with dark oaken rafters, and panelled with the same dark wood, which shone as bright as a mirror: there were plenty of guns and fishing tackle on the walls, interspersed with trophies of the chase; and a few portraits of hunters—old favourites probably of the Squire’s; at one end were displayed a few weapons of a warlike character: a basket-hilted sword, a couple

of holster pistols curiously inlaid, a pair of tattered colours, and a rapier, encircling the portrait of a gentleman of the time of the Charleses, showing that one of Mr. Foxton's ancestors had taken part in the troubles of that bloody period.

Whilst Linden and his companion were still pursuing their investigations, a servant appeared, who asked to know their business.

"We wish to see Mr. Foxton on justice business, if he is disengaged," said Linden.

"The Squire is in the justice-room at present," said the man, ushering them through the hall into a long passage, at the end of which, a door, covered with red serge, opened and closed again as they entered: "he will be at liberty in a moment, sir, if you will step in."

"Thank you, we won't detain him long," said Linden, pausing at the door, "we are not too late, I suppose?"

"Oh no, he is merely committing some poaching rascals," said the man; whose free-spoken manners bespoke a like freedom on the part of

his master; and he ushered Linden and Cecil into the august presence of Squire Foxton.

Linden glanced curiously over the interesting scene that presented itself upon his entry. A group of half-a-dozen men or so were immediately before him; their dark, swarth, half-hungered, half-ferocious look proclaiming them to be the poachers of whom the man had just spoken: next to them, and looking towards the judge, were another leash, leaning on their long-barrelled guns. They were the same as the others, and yet, like Dogberry's watchmen, they had a difference that struck you at first sight. They were equally swarth and ferocious, and yet were better fed, and looked just as much more at home in their present place as you can imagine the wiry haired well-fed cur of some village butcher, guarding his master's goods from the attacks of his half-starved brethren of the village.

"Well, my men," said a deep stern voice, that sounded as if it came from the broad deep chest of its owner, "you'll have to go to prison, and lie there for a three months or so; Sir Henry's

pheasants can't be knocked off their roosts in this manner; I'll commit you all, though I am sorry for it, as most of you have wives and families, and should have known better; Dawson, make out the commitments."

None of the men spoke. One or two smiled grimly, as if they had known their fate from the first; and Linden heard a smothered oath, and perhaps a groan, and then they were all removed in a body; and Squire Foxton threw himself back in his chair, and surveyed Linden and Cecil for two or three minutes without speaking.

The former had been eyeing him in turn with a good deal of interest, for his broad, square built, massy figure, clad in a black velveteen shooting jacket, forced itself upon your notice whether you would or not. He was probably sixty years of age, although he had all the fire and activity of a man twenty years his junior; and there was still the promise of many a tough day's hunting in that sinewy and powerful frame. He wore a good deal of powder in his hair, which was still very thick and bushy, and this old-fashioned foible

brought out the ruddy colour of his face, and the keen sparkle of his eyes still more forcibly; he had a loud sonorous voice, and a hasty abrupt delivery, and yet was no doubt a jovial fellow over a bottle for all that.

“ Well, sir, and what is your business?” he demanded of Linden, after a pause; “ my time,” referring to his watch, “ is nearly expired;” and he glanced through a side window towards a horse ready saddled, which a groom had just brought out.

“ I will not detain you long, Mr. Foxton,” said Linden, stepping forward.

“ Excuse me, sir, but I do not understand who you mean by that title,” said the justice, colouring still redder; “ my name is Squire Foxton, at your service.”

Linden bowed, and hastened to rectify his error.

“ Then, Squire Foxton, I am here to give evidence in a case of attempted robbery, if not something worse.”

“ Robbery, the deuce!” cried Squire Foxton with a loud “ whew!” “ did you ever hear of a

robbery in the parish before, Dawson?" turning to his clerk.

"Never since the rioters broke into Ford's Paper-mill sir," answered his clerk in a low tone; "had we not better take the gentleman's depositions?"

"Oh, ay to be sure. What is your name, sir?" demanded Squire Foxton, fixing a stern keen glance upon Linden.

The latter handed up a card, which the Squire read aloud, "Mr. Dalton—Gatcombe; so!" and the same keen searching glance was fastened upon Cecil's companion once more. Then the justice stooped over to his lean sallow looking clerk; and a whispered colloquy followed, at the end of which Squire Foxton again looked up and surveyed his visitor.

"I think, sir, I have seen you before," he said at last, after his factotum had again whispered something in his ear.

"Indeed! I do not recollect," began Linden; who in his turn surveyed the rather remarkable person of the Squire; "I rarely forget any one I

have once seen, and you, I think, might easily be carried in any one's mind.'

"You lived in Shropshire about eighteen years ago, did you not?" said Squire Foxton, pishing and pshawing as his clerk again attempted to whisper something in his ear; "hold your tongue, Dawson, until I've done. I believe, sir," turning to his visitor, "you lived just about that time at this very Gatcombe, as it is called."

"I did," said the other quietly.

"And your name is Edward Dalton?" continued the justice, with his loud deep voice.

"It is," responded Linden, glancing to Cecil, who heard all that passed, and who was proportionately astonished.

"If I remember right, also," said Squire Foxton, "just about that time a very painful event happened in your family, Mr. Dalton, but which probably every one but you and I have forgotten."

"There did! there did!" said Dalton, hiding his eyes for a brief space, as if some terrible picture had passed before them, "I would to God even we could forget it likewise!"

“ It shall, as far as I am concerned, sir,” said Squire Foxton, in a kinder tone; “ I was then newly qualified as a magistrate for that county, and being fresh to the business, all the points of that fearful tragedy impressed themselves most vividly on my mind.—Will you oblige me now by letting me know what you now require my assistance for?”

Dalton, for so we must now call him, briefly narrated his story, passing lightly over his own share in the transaction. He had scarcely done, when three or four constables brought in the three housebreakers.

Squire Foxton ran his eye rapidly over them, until the untamed air and bold gaze of Rudd challenged his observation; again and again his eye was fixed upon this man, wandering from him to his accuser, and back again until the man himself noticed it, and turned himself in such a manner that his face was thrown into deep shade, and then the Squire had to desist.

At the latter's request, Dalton repeated his

statement, and then the Squire asked them if they had anything to say in their defence.

No one answered him.

“Here, you fellow with the black bullying look—Gyde, I believe they call you, do they not?” cried the Squire, who fancied he detected the man, “have you nothing to say?”

The man swung round and darted a fierce glance from beneath his shaggy eyebrows, as he growled out, “My name is Rudd, Mr. Justice.”

“Oh, it is, is it?” retorted the latter, with a bantering sneer. “I only fancied I detected an old acquaintance in you, friend, that was all.”

The man muttered an oath, and turned away his face again, so that neither Dalton nor the Squire could see it.

“I will commit you all, my fine fellows, and as you will probably be transported, it will matter little whether my friend in the velveteens there is called Gyde or Rudd. Make out the commitments at once. Mr. Dalton, can I speak a word with you in another room?” and led the way to an inner apartment.

The men were in the meantime removed, well ironed, and Cecil amused himself as well as he could with the county paper for half an hour or so, at the end of which time Dalton returned. Squire Foxton did not again make his appearance, and Dalton, drawing Cecil's arm within his own, led him through the entrance-hall out into the old fashioned terrace garden beyond. He sighed heavily when they emerged into the open daylight, and drew down his hat over his eyes as if the light was painful to him; and all the way as they went back again to the quiet inn, he remained buried in deep and apparently painful thought.

"Let us get away from this place as soon as possible," said Dalton after dinner. "Where are you bound for, my friend?"

"Nowhere in particular," said Cecil, smiling.

"What do you say to accompanying me to Paris, then?" asked Dalton eagerly. "If you are undecided as to your destination, you could not have a better offer. Paris is the gayest place under the sun, and nowhere can you see life under so many different aspects."

"If you would encumber yourself with such a bore, as I am afraid I would prove myself to you," said Cecil irresolutely.

"Nothing could give me so much pleasure," cried Dalton, in a transport. "Something about you, Mr. Middleton, attracted me from the first.

It was the first time he had called Cecil by his name, and it jarred upon the young man's ear.

"Can you forgive a little deception I have played off upon you sir?" he said with momentary gravity.

"If it is nothing very heinous," said Dalton, who had quite recovered his gravity, and he looked anxiously at the young man.

"I told you," said Cecil, that my name was Middleton, which is in fact my mother's name. "I am in reality called Cecil Clarendon."

Dalton's keen dark eye was fixed upon him for full two minutes after he had made this avowal, without either party adding a word to the conversation. Cecil watched the pupil dilate and contract in no little astonishment, until Dalton rose up and grasped his hand.

“I knew and loved your father as a brother, Mr. Clarendon,” said he, with solemn earnestness. “I was at Pafis when I heard of his last illness, and came over instantly in the hope of seeing him alive. God help me! and you are Cecil Clarendon.”

He sat down again, and watched the young man from beneath his dark heavy brows, once more with the same stern solemn silence that he had done before.

“Have you seen Colonel Clarendon’s will?” he asked at last.

“I have not, sir,” was the young man’s reply.

“He promised me he should not know it until I divulged it myself,” muttered Dalton, still eyeing him with a curious air. “I dare not tell him now—why should I?” and he threw himself back in his chair, and sat for many minutes stern and silent as the dead.

“I have a right now, my friend, to your company,” said he, in a hoarse voice, starting up at length; “the friendship for the father is now transferred to the son. You will accompany me

to Paris?" and he wrung the young man warmly by the hand.

Cecil's heart was too full to permit him to speak; he faltered out some incoherent words, which Dalton put to rout in the midst, and then the chaise was ordered, and they took their leave of good Mrs. Tipperley, who shed many tears at their departure, and bade good-bye as well to honest John Sibbett, who looked as gruff and sturdy as ever he did.

The journey was a delightful one to Cecil. The weather was lovely; for spring, so tardy, so coy, so coquettish, had at last burst upon frost-bitten England, and every breath of wind came laden with a thousand sweet perfumes; every hawthorn hedge had a shower of snowy spray, every rocking tree they passed was a study; the cottages in the green lanes were perfectly embowered in roses and woodbine, the "rathe primrose," and the orchis gemmed every sunny bank, and the very air itself seemed to gush out with involuntary song, so ceaseless was the melody of the larks. Dalton bethought him of

other springs that he had witnessed in distant climes:—the dismal season of slush, and rain, and melting ice, and flooded rivers, (oceans rather,) of the Canadas; the dry, arid, intensely hot, yet fleeting one of stony Egypt; and the delicious, flowery, dream-hallowed, idle season of unfolding buds and gorgeous bloom witnessed beneath the blue skies of beautiful Italy; the solemn silence, the waking dream, that seems to grow into our very being, that possesses one so intensely amidst the fiords of old Norway—all, all came back to him once more, with all their vivid freshness; and his heart threw off its load and he became young once more.

“By Sunday we shall be in Paris,” said he, at length breaking the long silence.

Cecil started from his painful reverie, to sigh and say that he should not like Paris, he feared.

“You will be the first person I ever met with that thought so then,” said Dalton smiling. “Believe me, my dear fellow, that the fascinations of its opera comique—for Parisian life is nothing more—will prove too strong for your

stoicism to resist; your first draught of the cup of pleasure."

"I am in no mood for pleasure, I am afraid," said Cecil, sourly.

Dalton smiled, and popped his head out of the window to inquire how far they were from Canterbury; and after receiving an answer to his question, resumed his seat, and began to talk of Neuilly.

In spite of his moroseness Cecil began to feel interested by the graphic manner with which Dalton described the French court as it then existed. Playful wit, graphic anecdotes, and sparkling pictures of French society, as fresh and brilliant as if the narrator had just that moment doffed his sword and gay court suit, flowed from his lips in an endless stream. Now it was a piquant anecdote of the dilemmas of poor Charles X., the quarrels of his ministers, or the lofty hauteur of the Duchess de Berri; then he dived with epigrammatic brevity into the mysterious world of the grand opera, and described the queenly Rachel, the thrilling power

of Mars, or detailed his many conversations with the pale, gentlemanly, brave soldier and author, whom men now recognise as the purest writer of France—the author of *Cinq Mars*. And then he entered into a widely different subject; and after dwelling for a moment on the theatre of the Port St. Martin, began to talk of the wild, crime-stained, miserable wretches who burrow around its vicinity; the forgers, and coiners, and convicts, and guilty women of that worst phase of Parisian life.

“Pray don’t tell me anything more of them,” said Cecil, unconsciously shrinking from his companion.

His pale cheek and livid lip admonished Dalton that such a subject was likely to be distasteful to so young a man, and he talked of the *cafés* until Cecil fell asleep.

Dalton’s calm glance was fixed upon the half shrinking attitude he had unconsciously assumed in his sleep. The pale cheek and lip that quivered even in slumber, the contraction of the brow that betrayed the painful nature of

the poor lad's dreams; all these symptoms of sorrow excited his sympathy more than he would have cared to confess even to himself. The broad forehead which had awed Cecil so much at their first interview, contracted as if with pain, a few incoherent words escaped his lips; and then with an exclamation of contempt at his own folly, he leaned back in his own corner, and thought of Paris.

There was a Hotel in the *Chaussée d'Antin*, with an English porter of orthodox stoutness lounging on the steps, surrounded by half-a-dozen lacqueys in blue and orange liveries that rose up in his mind at this moment. The Hotel was very large, even for a Parisian one, and this, coupled with the costly style in which it was furnished, bespoke its possessor to be a man of princely fortune. The Major-domo preceded him to a room, at the door of which they stopped short as he entered. A lady, scarcely past the middle age, and a young girl——; but at that moment Cecil woke up, and Dalton's vision vanished.

CHAPTER XIV.

Nothing that Elcanor Clarendon had yet experienced, since her arrival at Leven, had given her so much pure, unalloyed happiness as her visit, short and fleeting as it was, to Fernilee. The noble character of Eric Dennison contrasting so strongly with the eccentric, yet equally remarkable, Lady Susan; and Lucy's gentle, unassuming sweetness of temperament, with the holy calm and serenity that seemed ever to brood over the lovely cottage and its fairy demesne, mingled even with her dreams, and made her more than once sigh to behold the fair reality once more.

But the all-eventful Tuesday,—the all-dreaded and all-wished-for,—came at last; and, from early morn till dewy eve, every one, from the very turnspit in the kitchen up to Lady Susan, were as

busy as bees. • All the horrid, ten thousand, abominable, petty miseries of preparation, the purgatory through which those who wish to have the eclat of giving an entertainment have to pass, before they enter upon the paradise of enjoyment: the turning of a decent, well-conducted, orderly house out of windows, consigning respectable pieces of furniture to oblivion and the lumber-room, and marshalling in their stead the pink forms and the chalked floors, the orchestra and the supper-room, with its sly corners, for delightful flirtations; the dust, and the hurry, and the noise and clatter of ten thousand tongues; all and every one of these had Eleanor experienced, until she was sick, and sated, and weary, and would have wished above all things that she could steal away to her own little boudoir, had not one or two circumstances in some measure alleviated her misery, and reconciled her in a degree to her present fate.

One of these was simply that Lucy Dennison, gentle and self-possessed as ever, had come over early in the carriage Lady Susan had sent for her: and, as if understanding and sympathising with the

pitiable strangeness Eleanor felt in such a heterogeneous company, all of whom were perfect strangers to her, Lucy kept close by her side whenever Lady Susan left her for a short time, to play the amiable to her guests.

This, however, was but seldom, for the buzz of admiration that arose when Eleanor first appeared, leaning on her old relative's withered arm, was so sweet to the old lady's ears, and the sounds were so strange within the venerable walls of Leven Castle, that Lady Susan, to whom such sounds were as the reflected homage of her own faded charms, very wisely retained her lovely guest as much as possible beside herself, enjoying with her own keen zest and spitefulness Eleanor's elegant manners and high-bred beauty, when contrasted with the red arms, high cheek-bones, red hair, and awkward demeanour, of too many of the daughters of the surrounding families.

"You are a perfect rosebud to-night, love," whispered she, in her most honied accent, tapping in an approving manner, Eleanor's glowing cheek with her fan, glancing as she spoke admiringly over

Eleanor's elegant figure, the Hebe-like proportions of which were set off to such advantage by the simple white muslin dress trimmed with rich lace and which, with this exception, could not boast of the slightest ornament; "ah! what beautiful hair that is, Eleanor!" twining one of Eleanor's glossy raven curls over her own withered fingers. "Now, child, dance only with those I introduce particularly to you. When I only bow, and say, Mr. Alexander Mac Shake, or Mr. Alexander any body else, you must understand that I don't wish you to accept such boobies as partners. But when I cry out, Eleanor, my love, Mr. Norman Macdonald, or, Sir Charles St. John, then call up the most winning smile from the vasty deep of your charms, and dance with them by all means. There, now, you've got your lesson, and now go, child, and remember it."

Poor Eleanor! she felt dizzy, and sick, and guilty, all at once. What a deception had Lady Susan's words suggested to her! She was to become a mere puppet in the hands of a cold, heartless, scheming monster, whose heart was as

dry and withered, and passionless as a mummy's. It was a relief that at that moment Lucy Dennison's bright, happy face beamed upon her, and Lucy's voice in the sweetest of tones cried out,

"Dear Miss Clarendon, do take me to your own room and summon Carson to our counsels, or I never shall get ready in time to make a respectable *debut* below."

Eleanor cheerfully obeyed by leading the way to her own apartments, Lucy following with a thousand protestations and apologies, which had the effect of dispelling the disagreeable visions Lady Susan's words had called up. No one could be sad five moments when Lucy Dennison was in their company, for she had the rare faculty of infecting others with her own cheerfulness; and Eleanor detected herself laughing heartily almost before they had sat down, on gaining her retreat.

"This is quite cosy, dear Miss Clarendon," said Lucy, gaily, as she glanced approvingly round the elegant dressing-room, on the mirror-

table of which a pair of wax candles were burning, whilst a bright fire was blazing up the chimney; "but we really have so little time, and I have so much to do, that Carson must be rung for at once."

"I know what a woman's 'must' is sufficiently well to obey you, instantly," said Eleanor, smiling, as she rang the bell for her maid; "can I assist you at all, Miss Dennison?"

Lucy answered by a very grave shake of the head; and then approaching Eleanor, whose beauty had never looked so brilliant before, so charmingly did the simple white dress set off her exquisitely lovely features, she stooped, and kissed her brow.

"I intend never to call you any thing but Eleanor, if you will allow me in future," said she, rather seriously.

"I shall be most happy, provided you will allow me to call you simply Lucy," said Eleanor, with great simplicity.

"Then that is agreed upon," and Lucy smiled again, as she turned round and added, "ah, here

is Carson. Carson, pray make me a decent figure with as little delay as possible."

The gay little *soubrette*,—for Carson, though an English girl, had received her professional education and her name in Paris,—immediately proceeded to follow her directions by producing from Lucy's boxes the simple grey satin robe, and rich yet sober mantle, she intended to wear on this eventful occasion; and after half an hour, at the very least, had been consumed in arranging these to the entire satisfaction of all parties, Lucy took Eleanor's arm, and the two friends proceeded in search of Lady Susan, who had in the interval sent two footmen in search of them.

They found her ladyship in the saloon, in which Lucy said she usually received her company. The stiffest of brocades and the most elaborate of head-gears, the most condescending of smiles, and the sweetest phrase, distinguished her ladyship on this particular evening; she had, even laid aside her high-heeled shoes, her rose buckles, and her gold-headed cane, and looked,

divested of all these, like one of those strange, fantastic, mysterious old fairies one reads of in fairy tales, who have good and evil spells at command, as fate or caprice requires. In the blaze of light which saluted Eleanor as she entered, she had at first some difficulty in recognising her ancient hostess in her new costume, and Lady Susan soon diverted her from admiring her diamonds and point lace, by calling her attention to the taste with which the room was decorated, which was in reality both very chaste and very elegant.

“Come here, children,” and Lady Susan led the way from one suite of rooms to another, followed by Eleanor and Lucy, “will not this little conservatory do charmingly for the dancers to turn into, when they get too heated in the rooms? and by a very simple contrivance Mac Graw has, by aid of a verandah, extended the supper-room upon the lawn in front, so that an adventurous swain may cajole his partner into a stroll through the shrubberies, before she well knows herself clear of the house;” and

Lady Susan laughed, gaily, as she directed their attention to this simple little ruse.

"My lady," said a footman, gliding noiselessly into the room, "Sir Price and Lady Hunter have come."

"Well, John, let them wait. Show them into the saloon." And Lady Susan turned round, and went on with what she was saying, "I dote on a surprise in an affair like this, girls; any thing for a sensation, for nothing is more wearisome than the endless, uneventful round of modern entertainments. I hope you will both aid me in making my fête pass off gaily. You, Lucy, know every one so well that——"

"Had we not better go to the saloon, Lady Susan?" interposed Lucy; "poor Lady Hunter will be so awkward if any one else comes before you arrive yourself."

"No, no," retorted Lady Susan, who seemed to have some motive for delaying her return to the saloon as long as possible; "let Lady Hunter receive my guests, if any should arrive. Ha! there comes a second carriage. Eleanor, one of

those lovely orangebuds in your hair would complete your *tournure*. There, love, now you are unique," and having placed the dark green leaves in Eleanor's beautiful tresses, Lady Susan held her at arm's length for a moment, and a strange, peculiar smile crossed her sharp withered features as she said, "and now, my love, you are superb."

Lucy smiled, although in reality her ears were distracted by the crash and din of carriages which had now commenced; and still the perverse old lady lingered, as if the very last business she had to do in the world was to receive the company she had thus summoned to her abode. And still the crash, and din, and noise, and uproar waxed more furious, and the startled domestics ran hither and thither, followed by troops of elaborately dressed squires and squiresses, and doors banged right and left, and feet went pattering up-stairs and down, and there was a rustling of satins, and a creaking of boots. And still Lady Susan kept her two companions beside her, smiling at Lucy's bewilderment and Eleanor's nervousness, until at length she threw her train over one arm, and

taking hold of Eleanor with the other, led the way, followed by Lucy, to the saloon.

The terrible Mr Mac Graw, with a white wand in his hand, was waiting to announce her; and, as Eleanor passed along the brilliantly lighted vestibule, with its crowd of footmen all hurrying to present themselves before the haughty Lady Susan, she could scarcely prevent herself from feeling that all this pomp and parade made even Lady Susan's faults pardonable. But her speculations were abruptly cut short by Mac Graw's opening the door to its fullest extent, and announcing with stentorian lungs, "Lady Susan Clarendon—Miss Clarendon—Miss Dennison."

Eleanor felt a whirl of emotions crowding upon her. She neither saw that the room was full of company, every one of whom were scrutinising her with lynx-eyed curiosity, nor that Lady Susan's triumph was complete. The surprise and pleasure she felt had literally intoxicated her, and thus absorbed in her own sensations, she suffered Lady Susan to lead her down the room, introducing her on every side as she passed,

whilst the room seemed to whirl around her, mixing up in a wild phantasmagoria the dry, shrewd, cautious faces of the old gentlemen, and the well-bred, yet equally withered faces of the old ladies, the bright, fresh faces of the young girls, and the bronzed, yet manly faces of the young men, most of whom were still standing grouped together, for the icy stiffness of the evening had not thawed sufficiently to enable them to dissolve into particles, and mingle with the rest of the company.

Suddenly Lady Susan uttered a name which recalled Eleanor to her sober senses.

“ Mr. Norman Macdonald, my love,” were her words.

Eleanor trembled in spite of herself, and looked up not without many misgivings, for she had painted Norman Macdonald like a very ogre to her own imagination.

A young man, dressed with exquisite simplicity, stood before her, whose whole appearance amply justified the eulogium Lady Susan had already passed upon him. A rich olive complexion, set off by eyes so brilliant that Eleanor almost

wondered at the singular attraction they lent to his finely chiselled features; his dark hair falling in a rich mass over a broad, manly brow; the winning smile that hovered around his mouth; his elegant person, and polished manners:—these were the first of Mr. Norman Macdonald's advantages and possessions which Eleanor had time to note, as Norman, blushing, yet easy and entirely self-possessed, smiled and bowed, and whispered his well-bred badinage to Lady Susan, whilst he gazed on Eleanor with an easy assumption of bashfulness, and of admiration, which equally sustained his character for politeness and *savoir-vivre* at the same moment.

And when Lady Susan introduced Miss Clarendon, and Norman had thus secured her hand for the first dance, and thereupon had led her away to the dancing-room, commencing their acquaintance by an observation, not upon any subject in which he could display his own wonderful abilities,—for do we not think ourselves philosophers at five-and-twenty?—but, by admiring Eleanor's friend Lucy's simplicity of character, Mr. Norman

thereby displayed his own tact and wisdom, and Eleanor at once felt all her own prejudice melting away like frostwork before the noonday sun; and, before they were half through their first quadrille, she began to wonder why she had ever disliked him at all, and to fancy that, after Cecil, this Norman Macdonald was by far the manliest and the most fascinating man she had ever known in her lifetime.

What a glow of satisfaction stirred up old Lady Susan's frosty heart, as she stood with her back against the wall, surrounded by a knot of ancient gentlewomen, eyeing Eleanor and Norman dancing together! She saw Norman bend down, and Eleanor's bright, lovely face lifted up to his with a conscious smile; and she turned away with a composed step, and a proud heart that was already beating high for the future.

Everything fed her expectations; every word she heard uttered ministered to her hopes; every tongue hymned the praise of Miss Eleanor Clarendon; and every one declared that this, the last of all the Clarendons, surpassed them all in

beauty, and grace, and elegance. Wherever Eleanor stirred, a crowd formed around her, to admire, to worship, and to applaud; and old Lady Susan, with her pursed-up lips, and wrinkled brow, and half-closed eyes, beheld it all, and rejoiced exceedingly.

It was nearly midnight, and the ball-room was well-nigh deserted, whilst the supper-room, the conservatory, and the adjoining tent on the lawn, were crowded to excess. In the latter, Eleanor, leaning on Norman Macdonald's arm, moved amongst the crowd, with a flushed yet happy countenance, on the fair lines of which the record of this her first triumph was written. The incense of adulation was so new to her, that it would have required the fortitude of a stoic to have withstood the temptation; and Eleanor was not a stoic, but a gentle, amiable, charming girl, with much that was loveable, and very little that was heroic, in her character; and so she enjoyed it all, and smiled when Norman spoke, and her little heart was in a wild flutter of delight, and the whole scene seemed but the fleeting vision of

some fairy tale, and she almost trembled lest the lights, and the music, and the buzz of pleasure, and the beautiful dresses, and the happy faces, should suddenly disappear, and leave her in darkness and despair.

“I must not allow you to monopolize Eleanor,” said Lady Susan, with no little consequence, as they chanced to meet just at this moment; “there is poor St. John in despair at his ill success, and as for Sir Charles Macdonald and Harry Cameron, they vow vengeance against you, Norman—”

“For winning Miss Clarendon from their clutches,” said Norman, smiling; “ah, Lady Susan, can you wonder at the crime when the temptation is so great?”

“Had you been that odious thing, a male flirt,” said Lady Susan, seriously, “I should not have trusted Eleanor with you so long; but now begone, and pay your respects to Lady Mary Winston, or there will be war in heaven.”

“Poor Lady Mary,” sighed Norman, in his blandest accents; “look at her, Miss Clarendon,”—directing her attention to the lady opposite,—

“did you ever see such a Niobe before? the very curl of her nose seems charged with grief.”

“Norman, I insist upon your decamping,” said Lady Susan, significantly, as she drew Eleanor’s arm within her own; “Miss Clarendon, I’m sure, is quite bored with your company already.”

“Miss Clarendon, I’m sure, could not be so cruel as to confirm your ladyship’s maledictions,” retorted Norman, darting an impassioned look upon Eleanor. “Do not, my dear Miss Clarendon, confirm from those ruby lips so shocking——”

“I shall cheerfully confirm anything Lady Susan chooses to say,” rejoined Eleanor, laughing, “if you do not obey her, Mr. Macdonald,——”

“What a vile calumny you would give countenance to!” said Norman, with a rueful smile, as he prepared to move. “Ah, my dear St. John, what a happy man you are!” cried he, with sudden vivacity, the next moment, spinning round by the shoulders a heavy, good-looking, prosy young man, who chanced to saunter up. “I wish you joy, my dear fellow; you are going

to be admitted into paradise—faith! the garden of Eden, or Prince Azmor's enchanted palace in the desolate island, was nothing to it. Ha! ha! you're a lucky fellow, St. John," and he clapped his auditor on the back at every word, whilst the latter, almost deprived of breath, could only ejaculate,—

"Ugh! ugh! what a fellow you are, Macdonald—what's all the noise about, eh, Lady Susan, eh? can you explain—ugh—won't you introduce—ugh! ugh! Miss Clarendon, your servant, ma'am—ugh! ugh!—give over, Macdonald,—ugh! ugh!"

"Ugh! ugh!" echoed Norman, mimicking him in such a manner as to make even Eleanor smile, "Miss Clarendon is your most obedient, St. John—ugh! ugh!" and with an easy bow to Eleanor, and a threatening shake to Lady Susan, he turned on his heel and sidled up to Lady Mary Winston.

"My dear Lady Mary, take my arm, and let us walk about and quiz the company," cried the abominable vagabond, settling his cravat. "Ha! ha! ha! there's poor St. John fairly caught by

Lady Susan's *élève*: seek her, Lady Mary?" bringing his glass with great coolness to bear upon the spot where Eleanor still stood, the victim of St. John's attentions. "Rather striking, eh? splendid figure, and brilliant eyes, but very insipid; dreadfully shy, in my opinion—never been out before, probably."

"To judge by the way Mr. Norman Macdonald has hovered round Miss Clarendon all the evening," said Lady Mary, twirling her fan, and never looking towards the person she addressed, "she must be very insipid indeed; I have not seen him speak to any of his own friends this evening, yet—but of course, Miss Clarendon's beauty, and Miss Clarendon's wit and grace, must throw such an admirer of the sex as Mr. Macdonald is known to be, into ecstasies."

Norman shrugged his shoulders and began to hum a sprightly ariette. He could afford to have inuendos flung at him; he could afford to be flouted with his admiration of a new beauty,—he, with his prestige of popularity, his reputation for lady-killing, his fine estate, and his fastidiousness.

And then Eleanor was so lovely, so peerless; there was no vile dross in the charms that won his admiration, and led his erring steps from poor Lady Mary Winston, who, though an earl's daughter, with an unsullied pedigree and a Jew's dower was neither handsome, nor talented, nor good tempered. Eleanor was so fresh, so unhackneyed in the keen zest and pleasure with which she enjoyed everything. Her very ignorance was so original and piquant, that Norman could not stifle the admiration rising in his heart, when he glanced over to her and then turned round upon the indignant Lady Mary beside him.

"Look at St. John, Lady Mary; I declare the man's bewitched, broke down, by Jove, and not able to utter one word of badinage or sober sense, even—do you not pity the poor fool?"

"Look at his great red face and his staring eyes," chimed in Lady Mary, raising her glass, and laughing ill-naturedly; "poor St. John!"

"Ha! ha! Lady Mary, will you dance?" said Norman, seizing with infinite dexterity the happy moment, and before she well knew where

she was, Lady Mary's arm was on Norman's shoulder, and with his hand round her waist, was suffering herself to be whirled round the room in one of the most rapid of waltzes; whilst poor Eleanor, having droned through a quadrille with St. John, who was very honest and simple, and even respectable, as a country gentleman, yet sadly out of place in a crowded ball-room, sat down in the first empty place she could find, and began to grow misanthropical.

Eric Denison, simple and noble even in the midst of such a scene, very fortunately passed just in time to prevent such a catastrophe. His fine, venerable features lighted up with a smile of pleasure the moment he perceived her, and with an exclamation of surprise he said, as he offered her his arm, "You here, Miss Clarendon, and alone! why, what revolution can have surprised our young men, to suffer you to be so neglected!"

"I am not neglected, dear Mr. Dennison," said Eleanor, taking the proffered arm. "I only felt rather tired, and sat down."

"Well, well, my dear, let us find Lady

Susan ; you look rather flushed," and with kind sternness, Eric's gaze was fixed on the young girl's heated cheek. "You must not make your first ball a toil instead of a pleasure. as too many do: here is Lucy coming," said he, as his daughter joined them.

"You, father, playing the cavalier to Miss Clarendon !" cried she, in astonishment. "Why, what can have happened?"

"Nothing but that Miss Clarendon, I fancy, is tired of folly, with its caps and bells, and has come to while away the time a-bit with wisdom and its wig, Lucy," said Eric, good humouredly. "But we're in search of Lady Susan at this moment."

"I saw her half a moment ago—but had we not better go out upon the lawn to see the fireworks on the lake?" suggested Miss Dennison. "Should you not like to see them, Eleanor?"

"Of all things; oh, pray let us see the fireworks!" cried Eleanor, eagerly. "Dear Mr. Dennison, do take us to the lawn."

"Certainly; here, Lucy, take my other arm,"

said Eric to his daughter ; “ the night is so very mild, neither of you need be afraid of catching cold.”

The crowd in which they now found themselves entirely prevented any reply, and by the time they gained the lawn, the fireworks having already commenced, their attention was so fully occupied, that they had not for some time leisure to continue the conversation.

Almost immediately behind them, although perfectly unaware of their vicinity, a pretty numerous party, amongst whom were Lady Susan and Norman Macdonald, had established themselves very much to her ladyship's satisfaction. Now, for some time after they had arrived, Lady Susan was too much occupied with her own importance in the matter in hand to have time for anything else. There were the devices to be explained, and the effect those not yet exhibited would have upon the water to be dilated upon. There was a fairy temple to be illuminated with amber lights, and green rockets to whiz round and round, and Catherine wheels

to explode, and fiery dragons to fly up to the great balcony window ; and all this took a great deal of time in the telling, which was further prolonged by the compliments and congratulations most liberally showered upon her on every side. But at length the happy Lady Susan found time to breathe, as her guests absorbed the conversation, and taking Norman Macdonald's arm, she turned round, and recognising the little party below, made them aware in a moment of her presence by shaking Eleanor's arm, as she said—

“ Come, come, young ladies, you've seen all these gew-gaws long enough on *terra firma*. Robin has provided a fairy fleet of boats for a sail on the lake, and as the moon is rising, I think a sail would be a mighty pretty thing—what do you say, Eleanor? Herr Zuingler will burn blue lights the whole voyage, and as the band will play in the pavilion in the centre, the whole affair will be romantic and delightful in the extreme ; there is not the slightest danger, and as Norman, here, is a very safe pioneer, you need not be in the slightest degree alarmed.”

Eleanor looked rather startled, although the bright flush that overspread her countenance betrayed the delight she would have taken in such an enterprise. Eric looked grave, though he did not even turn to Lucy, when Lady Susan asked her to join the party, but he still watched Eleanor with a mournful gaze. At that moment, as if to second her ladyship's persuasions, the fairy bower in the centre of the lake was suddenly illuminated, and the band, who had got thither by the opposite side, struck up the singularly wild and terrific incantation scene in *Der Freischütz*: the whole scene seemed like magic itself. There was the beautiful sheet of water without a ripple upon it, glowing in the vivid light streaming from its centre, with the dark cones of the larches and aspens fringing its banks, girdling it in; the tiny fleet of boats, rapidly filling with Lady Susan's guests, whose strikingly appropriate dresses heightened the illusion; the spectators on the shore as distinct as in the brightest noon; the rounded moon just rising like a silver shield over the adjoining coppice:

the grey castle behind, every window of which glittered with light; and immediately in front Eleanor perceived Norman Macdonald, handsomer than ever, earnestly watching her countenance, as if his very being depended upon her words.

"There is only one boat remaining unoccupied," said Lady Susan, at this juncture; "run down, Norman, and secure it—come, girls, follow me. Eric, I will rejoin you here presently," and before Eric even could interfere, her ladyship had taken hold of a hand of each, and was half way down to the lake.

As they were standing on the bank, waiting for the boat, St. John suddenly came up.

"Are you going to brave the perils of the deep, Lady Susan?" said he, with a little more animation than he had ever before been known to exhibit in conversation.

"No, no, simpleton," retorted Lady Susan, with gruff complacency; "what should tempt an old fool like me on the water?"

"Then who does go?" persisted St. John,—
"you, Miss Lucy?"

"Yes; and Eleanor, and Mr. Norman Macdonald."

"Then you can take another, Miss Lucy,—eh?"

"Certainly," rejoined Lady Susan; "do you want to make the fourth blockhead?"

"Yes, yes, I've no objection," retorted St. John, laughing good-humouredly; "I suppose I can only sink or swim like the rest."

"Humph! no necessity either to sink or swim that I can see," growled Lady Susan, in a frightfully audible tone; "but hark ye, my fine fellow! if you don't bring Eleanor and Lucy here, safe back, you need never show that face of yours at Leven again."

"Oh! dear me, Lady Susan," remonstrated poor St. John, in the utmost horror, at finding himself suspected, even, of such terrible crimes.

"Silence, simpleton," thundered her ladyship, in her most awful voice, as the boat in which Norman had already seated himself, came alongside; "now St. John, jump forward and hand the ladies in; don't be afraid of your dresses,

girls, I've had the whole fleet lined out with crimson serge; and now, gentlemen, beware of the slightest accident;" and with this solemn adjuration delivered in tones, the thrilling effect of which Mrs. Siddons herself might have envied, her ladyship turned away, and rejoined Eric Dennison on the terrace above.

"Are you afraid, Lucy?" said Eleanor, as she pressed Miss Dennison's hand, in the brief interval that elapsed before Norman and St. John could hand them on board, and she looked eagerly into the calm placid face of her friend.

"Not in the slightest, dearest; here in Scotland, we are accustomed to the water from childhood, and a sail like the present, which will be over in a quarter of an hour, will be quite delicious."

"Come, Miss Clarendon, come, Miss Lucy," cried Norman's eager voice at that moment; "hollo, St. John, man! give Miss Clarendon your hand: there now, we're all right, here, sit down, one and all, whilst our Charon uses his oars," and Norman, with his usual dexterity, contrived to

manœuvre Lucy beside the unromantic St. John, at the prow of the frail little skiff, whilst he seated himself beside Eleanor at the stern.

“Really, I could excuse any one’s feeling romantic at such a time,” said Eleanor, smiling, as she eyed, with a delighted gaze, the glittering temple, from the interior of which, now issued an exquisite air from “The Midsummer Night’s Dream,” and then looked back upon the busy shore; “it really looks like a scene from Elysium.”

“Ah, Miss Clarendon! what an Elysium the world would be,” sighed Norman, who was forced to sit so close to his companion that their faces almost touched; “if we could only find congenial spirits in this lower world, what a paradise it might be made!”

Eleanor scarcely heard him,—everything was so novel, so exhilarating, so charming, that every sense was taken up already.

“I never was on a lake before, by night; and then Lady Susan has such exquisite taste,” said she, laughing, as she took off the little bonnet

she wore so coquettishly, and shaking the beautiful hair from her face, which looked all in a glow with pleasure; she really looked quite peerless, and all unconscious of Norman's impassioned gaze, she sat with her head partly raised so as to see everything more distinctly, whilst Norman gazed by turns on her ivory throat, so exquisitely modelled, the rich carnation bloom of her cheeks, the raven hair that fell in a perfect shower on her shoulders, and the lustrous eyes that were never at rest for one moment, but gazed as if they never could be tired of admiring, where all was so new, and so exciting.

Presently Eleanor's mood seemed to change; though the same eager expression still lingered on her features, her beautiful eyes were filled with tears.

"Eleanor!—pardon me,—Miss Clarendon," said Norman, taking her hand gently in his own; "you are not ill, I hope?"

"No—no!—excuse such weakness, Mr. Macdonald," said Eleanor, striving to smile, "I had allowed my thoughts to play traitor to me, and hence this momentary impression of pain."

Norman's quick-witted memory instantly reverted to the explanation Lady Susan had some days earlier favoured him with, of Eleanor's connexions, and he did not hesitate in believing that Eleanor's thoughts were reverting to her own home at Delaval; in this, however, he was partly mistaken, as Eleanor's thoughts were all with Cecil and Herbert at that moment.

"You were very much attached to Delaval?" said he, in a gentle tone.

"Yes, very," sighed Eleanor, almost unconsciously, "we were all so very, very happy."

"All!" thought Norman, who was quite ignorant of the existence of Eleanor's brothers, Lady Susan having, for very sufficient reasons, kept this little fact a secret entirely to herself; and then he added aloud:—

"Delaval used to be a very gay place, I believe?—Colonel Clarendon kept a great deal of company?"

"Oh no,—at least not of late: when mamma was alive, I believe it was so; but since poor papa's health grew so precarious, we lived very

much retired indeed, and in fact were nearly secluded from the world;" and Eleanor sighed, as she thought of dear Delaval.

"How I should like to have known Colonel Clarendon!" murmured Norman, as if speaking aloud.

"I wish you had,—you would have loved him so much; but dear Cecil is so like him," said Eleanor, earnestly.

"And who is Cecil?" thought Norman, who began to feel himself fishing in troubled waters; "patience! patience!" and he leaned over the side of the boat and began to make a ripple on the water, as they scudded along.

"Did you ever feel this terrible feeling of home sickness," said Eleanor, more gaily, presently afterwards, "the sickly longing for what you know at the same time to be so intangible?"

"No, never," said Norman, still playing with the ripples, although he looked up; "I warn you, Eleanor,—pardon me!"

"Pray don't—why should I not be called Eleanor?—I'm most used to its familiar sound."

Norman's manly countenance was lighted up in an instant. "May I call you plain Eleanor?" cried he, in an eager tone, sitting straight up beside her.

"Certainly not plain Eleanor!" said Eleanor, laughing.

"Bah! with such a charming countenance, any one would be an idiot to call you plain Eleanor;—I meant, simple Eleanor."

"Nor simple Eleanor, sir."

"Simply Eleanor, then, which was what I meant from the first," cried Norman, decisively, as he caught hold of his companion's hand; "and to seal the ratification of this treaty between us two, Eleanor and Norman, dropping all extraneous titles whatever.—"

"Really, Mr. Norman Macdonald!——"

"There, you have broken the treaty at once, and are subject to double forfeit, which should be a salute from those ruby lips; but I will be magnanimous!" and Norman gallantly raised Eleanor's little hand to his lips.

Matters, unfortunately, had not been proceeding

so happily at the other end of the boat. Poor St. John, who was afflicted with an equal taciturnity and restlessness, threatened at every moment to precipitate the whole party into the water, by his awkwardness.

At one moment, he would lean over the gunwale, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of the stars reflected on the tide, and then starting up, he would eye the little temple, and endeavour to single out his friends on the terrace, or shake hands with an acquaintance in the numerous skiffs continually passing and repassing them; and all this while, poor Lucy, neglected and forlorn, was harassed by a thousand fears, for she knew how frail was the equilibrium to which they trusted, and that one hasty jerk of St. John's awkward body would infallibly plunge them all into the water.

And all this while Eleanor and Norman were very happy, for they were beginning to talk about the moon, and Norman began to quote something from Scott on the subject; and just at that moment, a scream,—no, Lucy never screamed,

but a startling ejaculation was heard, and the boat swayed violently to one side, and then a deep oath from the old boatman, and then a scream echoed from every point, as the frail skiff heeled over, precipitating, with one fell plunge, the little party into the water.

“Look! look! there’s one up again,” cried half a dozen voices, as the old boatman rose to the surface; “ha! it’s only the old man; for mercy’s sake get help; where’s Miss Clarendon? where’s Lucy Dennison? where is St. John?”

Who in that terrible moment could answer?

Those who were on shore, flew down to the water’s edge, their horror-stricken faces looking absolutely ghastly, in the glare reflected upon them from the water; on the lake all was terror and confusion of heart; all felt that something was to be done, and yet none knew what was to do, and who had to do it.

“They will all be drowned! can nobody help them?” cried a hundred tongues.

“I see something,” cried a voice, louder than all the rest.

“Where? where?”

“There! there! ha, it’s St. John, with some one in his arms,” rejoined fifty voices; “A boat! a boat!” and a good score of lusty arms were strained to the oars, as the innocent cause of the mischief rose, blowing like a porpoise to the surface; “now easy, my lads, don’t crush in, and sink him again;—quiet, St. John, you’re all safe; don’t let go yet, man, we’ll take Miss Dennison from you in a moment;” and St. John, who looked scared out of his wits, suffered himself to be directed by those around him, and though terribly chill, and uncomfortable, forgot even to shiver, until poor Lucy in a dead faint, was lifted on board.

“Ugh! ugh! where is Norman and Miss Clarendon?” gasped the poor fellow, suddenly, as if he was just awaking from a dream.

A dead silence came over all; none dared to answer the now unhappy man, who lay crouching in the bottom of the boat.

“Where is Miss Clarendon?” cried he, the next moment, starting wildly up; “has she not

been seen? for pity's sake, speak! where is Miss Clarendon?"

Not a sound—not a word—not a lip stirred.

"I'll find her, or die for it," said he; "it was my fault that the boat was upset; it was through me she was drowned, and I'll drown myself too, or find her," and the unhappy young man would have plunged into the lake again, had he not been forcibly held back by those around him.

"I tell you I will find them; didn't I upset the boat? didn't I drown them? don't talk to me, I will find them!" cried he, struggling violently with those who held him back; "I'm answerable for them, I say."

"Nonsense, St. John; you can't do any good," reiterated a dozen voices; "you are so numb, with cold, that you'd sink in a moment."

"Numb! ha! ha!" he cried, laughing wildly; "I say I'm not numb, nor cold either; I'm all on fire, I'm burning hot; I will find them or die for it."

At that moment, a joyful sound was heard, and those around the unhappy young man, saw two or three people running towards them.

“What do they say,” inquired the poor fellow, faintly; “have they any tidings of Miss Clarendon?”

“Yes! yes! at least, we hope so.”

“For mercy’s sake, tell me,” he cried, clenching his hands, and glaring wildly round him; “why do you keep a poor wretch in torture, thus:—”

Another shout, and this time a few words were plainly audible.

“They are found ——”

“Thanks!” ejaculated St. John, falling back into a young man’s arms.

The reaction was too powerful and he had fainted.

END OF VOL. I.

